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AAP's Sanjay among 8 booked for 'fake' videos

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After much loss, Discoms post profit of Rs 2,701 cr

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SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

ساڈھ روزنامہ بنگلور

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3 soldiers hurt in encounter with terrorists in J&K

JAMMU, 18 JAN

Three soldiers sustained injuries during a gunfight with terrorists in a remote area of Jammu and Kashmir's Kishtwar district on Sunday. The operation, called 'Operation Trashi-I', initiated around noon, followed the Army's Jammu-based White Knight Corps coming into contact with terrorists during a joint search operation with Jammu and Kashmir Police. The engagement occurred in the Sonnar region, north-east of Chatroo, when a search team encountered two to three foreign terrorists, allegedly linked to Pakistan's Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), who opened fire indiscriminately. Following a retaliatory response, additional reinforcements were deployed, with soldiers suffering splinter injuries and evacuated to a hospital. The ongoing operation has intensified ahead of Republic Day amid intelligence reports of imminent terrorist attempts crossing the border. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

Trump invited Sharif to join Gaza Peace Board: Pak

ISLAMABAD, 18 JAN

Pakistan on Sunday said that the United States of America President Trump invited Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif to join the Board of Peace for Gaza. President Trump has already declared himself as the chair of the body. In response to media queries, the spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Tahir Andrabi confirmed that Pakistan did get a formal invitation. The White House released a list of appointed members to the founding Executive Board of the Board of Peace on Friday as the country moved to the second phase of Trump's 20-point peace plan for Gaza. *—PTI*

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PHOTO: X

Chinnaswamy only got conditional nod for games: HM

BENGALURU, 18 JAN

Karnataka Home Minister G Parameshwara said on Sunday that M Chinnaswamy Stadium has been granted permission to host cricket matches, but only conditionally, with strict safety norms. A high-level committee, formed following the Justice John Michael Cunha Committee's recommendations, inspected the stadium and submitted its report. Based on this, the Karnataka State Cricket Association (KSCA) can organise matches, provided all corrective measures are completed within the stipulated time frame. The KSCA has already begun the work and given written assurances. Approval remains conditional, with a further inspection planned before any match. Cricket was suspended after a June stampede during Royal Challengers Bangalore celebrations killed 13 people. *— PTI*

>>>More on Page 2

MODI CRIES 'INFILTRATORS' IN ASSAM & BENGAL

PM launches Rs 6,957-cr Kaziranga corridor, projects worth Rs 830 cr in WB

SINGUR/ KALIABOR, 18 JAN

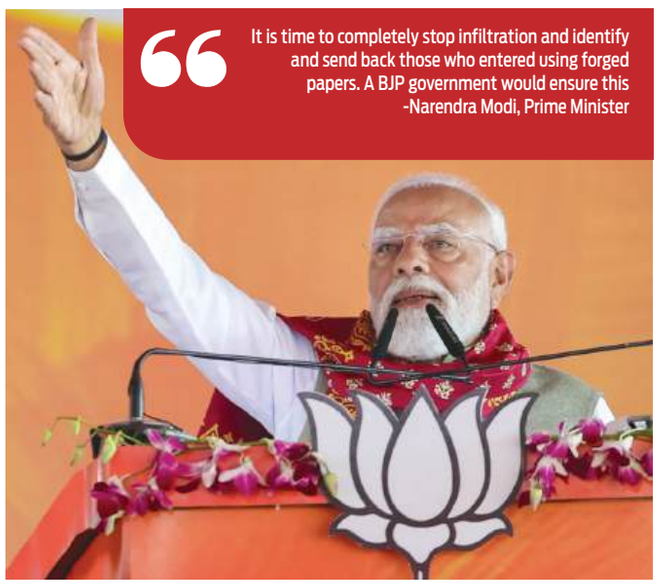
Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday mounted an election-season attack on the TMC government in West Bengal and the Opposition Congress in Assam, accusing them of protecting "infiltrators" for vote bank politics.

The 294-member West Bengal Assembly polls are due in about three months while Assam is expected to elect 126 members in March or April.

In separate rallies in Assam and West Bengal, Modi first said Congress' only goal was to protect infiltrators, while the TMC in Bengal has sacrificed national security for them. He dubbed the TMC as a "maha jungle raj".

On his second day in Assam, Modi laid the foundation stone for the Rs 6,957-crore Kaziranga Elevated Corridor, and virtually flagging off two Amrit Bharat trains. The corridor will also improve connectivity between Upper Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.

There, he said: ''Infiltrators are disturbing the demographic balance, attacking culture, snatching jobs from the poor and youth, and fraudulently occupying land in tribal areas,


It is time to completely stop infiltration and identify and send back those who entered using forged papers. A BJP government would ensure this
-Narendra Modi, Prime Minister

posing a grave threat to both Assam and the nation's security".

He noted the success of the BJP in Bihar, Maharashtra's civic polls, and even in Kerala.

Later, in West Bengal's Singur, Modi launched development projects worth over Rs 830 crore in the state and flagged off three Amrit Bharat trains connecting Kolkata with other parts of the country.

"Shouldn't such a government be punished for acting against the interests of the people of Bengal?" he asked, terming the TMC "anti-women".

The TMC hit back, claiming that no large number of Bangladeshi or Rohingya infiltrators had been detected during the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) exercise. *—PTI*

GBS outbreak claims 2 lives in MP town

NEEMUCH, 18 JAN

Two people have died after an outbreak of Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS), an immunological nerve disorder, in Madhya Pradesh's Neemuch district, forcing the government to launch a drive to identify patients, officials said.

Following the detection of over a dozen cases in Manasa town, the authorities have been asked to set up a control room, create a special ward for GBS patients at the local government hospital and make other arrangements.

Deputy Chief Minister Shukla said that the first GBS patients in Manasa were identified on 12 January and admitted to hospitals in Jaipur and Ahmedabad. He said 14 GBS patients have been detected so far in Manasa, which has a population of about 35,000.

GBS is a disease in which a patient's immune system mistakenly starts attacking the peripheral nervous system. Parts of the body suddenly become numb, muscle weakness develops, and they may also face difficulty in swallowing or breathing. GBS is sometimes linked to eating undercooked poultry, unpasteurised dairy, or consuming water contaminated with sewage. *—PTI*

K'taka to pitch execution-ready projects at WEF

BENGALURU, 18 JAN

Karnataka will project itself as an execution-ready investment destination at the WEF Annual Meeting 2026 in Davos, Minister **MB Patil** said on Sunday. Patil said the State's engagement would be driven by an "execution-first" strategy.

"The State's engagement at WED will be guided by an execution-first approach, with a strong emphasis on converting investment intent into on-ground implementation," Patil's office said in a statement.

The focus, he added, would be on translating investment interest into tangible outcomes. "Our effort is to swiftly move investment intent towards filings, approvals, land allotments and actual execution on the ground."

The Karnataka delegation led by Patil has departed for Davos-Klosters, where the WEF annual meeting will be held from 19 to 23 January.

The WEF meeting provides a global platform for trust-based engagement, robust debate and public dialogue, and is aimed at promoting investment and economic cooperation.

The delegation will participate in more than 45 high-level engagements, including bilateral meetings and roundtables, aimed at accelerating investor decision-making, it added.

The delegation is scheduled to meet global majors such as Amazon Web Services, Lenovo, Coca-Cola and the Singapore Economic Development Board.

- The WEF meeting will be held from 19 to 23 January in Davos, and is aimed at promoting investment and economic cooperation. MB Patil will lead the State in the absence of DyCM DK Shivakumar

A special session titled 'Karnataka's Emerging Industry Advantage' will also be hosted.

Among those attending from India are Union Ministers Ashwini Vaishnaw, Shivraj Singh Chouhan, Pralhad Joshi, and K Rammohan Naidu, alongside six Chief Ministers including Maharashtra's Devendra Fadnavis and Andhra Pradesh's N Chandrababu Naidu.

Notable figures from Pakistan, including Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif will also be present. *—PTI*

>>>More on Pages 2, 5

Why is US paying for AI in India? Navarro attacks

NEW YORK/ WASHINGTON, 18 JAN

White House trade advisor Peter Navarro has renewed his criticism of India, questioning why Americans are paying for Artificial Intelligence in India.

Navarro's comments on Saturday came amid a strain in India-US ties, which began after US President Donald Trump slapped a 50 per cent tariff on New Delhi, including a 25 per cent additional duty for its purchase of Russian crude oil.

In an interview on Real America's Voice, Navarro said,"...It's like, why are Americans paying for AI in India? Chat GPT(is) operating on US soil, using American electricity, servicing large users of Chat GPT, for example, in India and China and elsewhere around the world. So that's another issue that's got to be dealt with."

His comments came as ties between New Delhi and Washington are reeling under strain on several other issues apart from tariffs, including Trump's claim of ending the India-Pakistan conflict in May last year and Washington's new immigration policy.

Last year, Navarro consistently ranted against India for Delhi's purchases of Russian oil and high tariffs, calling India the "Maharajah of tariffs." *—PTI*

Lawyers can't file RTIs for clients: CIC

NEW DELHI, 18 JAN

The Central Information Commission (CIC) has ruled that advocates cannot use the Right to Information (RTI) Act to seek details regarding cases they are handling for their clients.

The CIC ruling came after it dismissed a second appeal by an advocate in a dispute related to the termination of a fruits-and-vegetables supply contract at a Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya in Haryana.

The Information Commissioner Sudha Rani Relangi noted that the appellant had sought information "on behalf of his brother, who used to be supplier of vegetables/fruits to the respondent public authority".

- The RTI allows any citizen to request information from govt bodies and recieve a response in 30 days, ensuring transparency & accountability

The Commission held that using the transparency law in this manner fails to advance its core objectives.

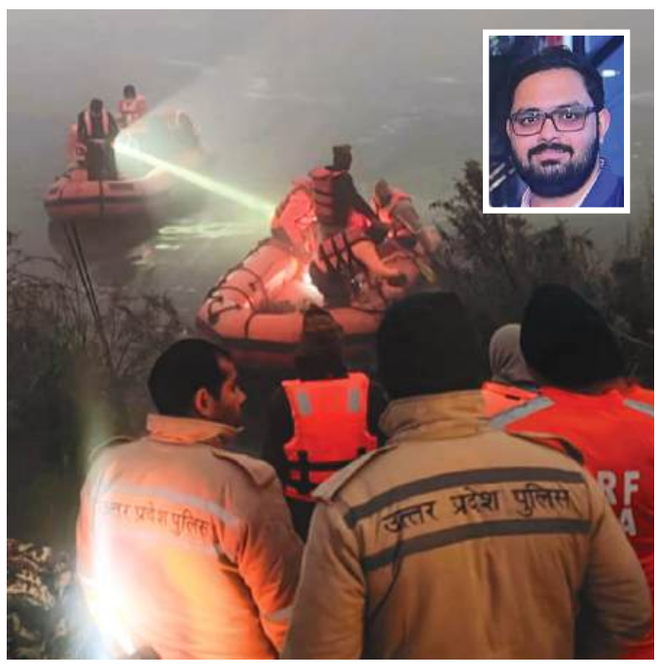
In the absence of any explanation as to why the supplier himself could not seek the information, "it appears that the appellant has sought information on behalf of his client per se, which is not permissible," the CIC maintained.

Quoting a Madras High Court order, the CIC underlined that "a practising advocate cannot seek information relating to the cases instituted by him on behalf of his client".

The commission further quoted the ruling to stress that the "laudable objectives of the RTI Act cannot be used for personal ends and should not become a tool in the hands of the advocate for seeking all kinds of information in order to promote his practice". *—PTI*

AT UNDER-CONSTRUCTION BASEMENT

Techie dies after car plunges into water pit in Noida



Police and State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) search for 27-year-old software engineer Yuvraj Mehta who died after his car spun out of control and fell into a 20-feet-deep water-filled pit in Noida **PHOTO:PTI**

NOIDA, 18 JAN

A 27-year-old software engineer died after his car went out of control and fell into a 20-foot-deep water-filled pit that was dug for the basement of an under-construction building in Sector 150 of Greater Noida.

Police at the Knowledge Park police station said on Sunday that they received information at around 12.15 am that a car had plunged into a pit near Sector 150.

The deceased was identified as Yuvraj Mehta, a resident of the Tata Eureka Park society in Sector 150. He was working as a software engineer with a reputed company in Gurugram and was returning home from work at the time of the incident, police said.

"The search operation was carried out with the help of the NDRF, SDRF, fire department and the local police. The body was recovered at around 4 am on Saturday," Additional Commissioner of Police (Greater Noida) Hemant Upadhyay said.

He said preliminary investigation suggested that fog and overspeeding may have led to the accident, following which the car crossed a drain and fell into the pit.

The body has been sent for post-mortem, and further investigation is underway, police said.

Moninder, a delivery agent and an eyewitness, said he entered the drain in an attempt to help the techie. He blamed the authorities for what he called their alleged "negligence".

Mehta's father, Raj Kumar Mehta, said his son had managed to call him shortly after the accident. He said he reached the spot but could not help his son as the water was too deep. He said his son could have been saved had the police had a swimmer with them. *—PTI*

AQI DROPS TO 'SEVERE' AS FOG BLANKETS DELHI

The Air Quality Index in the capital hit 'severe' category, as New Delhi recorded a maximum temperature of 22.7 degrees Celsius, 3.1 notches above the seasonal average. Dense fog enveloped most parts of the city in the early hours, according to the Met office. The city's AQI is expected to be in the 'very poor' range from Monday till 21 January.

7 DIE, 80 HURT IN J'KHAND MARRIAGE PARTY TRAGEDY

LATEHAR, 18 JAN

At least seven people, including five women, were killed and over 80 others were injured after a bus carrying wedding guests overturned in Jharkhand's Latehar district on Sunday.

The accident occurred at Orsa Bangladara valley, falling under the Mahuadanr police station limits. Two people died during treatment in the hospital, another official said.

Chief Minister Hemant Soren, asked the Latehar deputy commissioner to provide appropriate medical facilities to the injured.

Sub-Divisional Magistrate (SDM) Vipin Kumar Dubey said, "Thirty-two seriously injured were referred to RIMS Ranchi for better treatment."

The driver, Vikas Pathak, said around 90 passengers were on the bus. "The brakes of the bus failed. Despite attempts to stop the vehicle, I could not regain control, and the bus overturned". *—PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

Cong plans grand event for 1,000 days in office

HAVERI, 18 JAN

Congress MLC Saleem Ahmad announced on Sunday that a grand event will be held in Haveri on 13 February, to mark 1,000 days of the Congress government in Karnataka. "Nearly one lakh pattas will be distributed to the people. The government has fulfilled its promises under the leadership of CM Siddaramaiah, Deputy CM DK Shivakumar, Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge, and LoP in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi," he said. Deputy CM DK Shivakumar arrived in Delhi on Friday to meet Congress leaders. When asked about his visit and potential chief ministerial talks, he said these were private matters between him, the High Command, and the Chief Minister. He plans meetings with Union Ministers on irrigation projects. *—ANI*

Bidar teen falls to his death while flying kite

BIDAR, 18 JAN

A teenager died after falling from the roof of a building while flying a kite in the Vanjari locality of Humnabad—also known as Jayasimha Nagar— in Bidar district on Saturday evening, police reported. The deceased has been identified as Shashikumar, 19. According to reports, Shashikumar had climbed onto the roof of a private college building in Humanabad along with his friends to fly kites. While trying to catch a kite, he reportedly lost his balance and fell from the building, dying on the spot. A case has been registered at the Humanabad police station and further investigation is underway. *—SALAR NEWS*

Safe City Project reunites missing children with tech

BENGALURU, 18 JAN

The City police utilised the Bengaluru Safe City Project to conduct rapid, technology-assisted rescue operations for the last twelve days that successfully traced and reunited missing children with their families within minutes. The police stated that operations were facilitated through the 'Namma-112' emergency system, promoting real-time responses and GPS-based deployment of patrol vehicles. The first case occurred on 27 December 2025, under the JP Nagar police station, where a mentally unstable woman attempted to abduct a two-year-old child. An assistant sub-inspector alerted 'Namma-112', resulting in a Hoysala patrol reaching the scene within five minutes. *—PTI*

Party first, nation second: BYV on DKS skipping WEF

Deputy CM says he will not discuss party matters in public

BENGALURU/ NEW DELHI, 18 JAN

State BJP President BY Vijayendra and Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar *PHOTO: PTI*

State BJP President BY Vijayendra flayed Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar after the latter cancelled his official visit to Davos for the World Economic Forum (WEF) due to official engagements in Bengaluru and New Delhi.

"We firmly believe that the "Nation comes first, and the party next". For the Congress, however, it is always the party first, with the Nation relegated to the very end," Vijayendra wrote on X on Sunday. "The WEF at Davos was a golden opportunity to showcase our State as a unique and attractive destination for global investors, an opportunity that could have driven employment generation and promoted industrial growth beyond Bengaluru."

"Yet, the conduct of Shivakumar clearly exposes the apathy of the Congress leadership towards governance and their distorted priorities," Vijayendra added. "At a time when the State desperately needs development and economic revival, the DyCM chose to skip this crucial global platform."

Vijayendra claimed that the engagements Shivakumar's office cited on Saturday when it announced he would not be going to Davos were related to the ongoing alleged power tussle with Chief Minister Siddaramaiah for the State's top post.

The BJP Chief also noted that neither Shivakumar nor Siddaramaiah received German Chancellor Friedrich Merz when he visited the City recently. Both of them instead met with part leader Rahul Gandhi.

The WEF is set to convene its 56th Annual Meeting in Davos from 19 to 23 January.

Meanwhile, at the Karnataka Bhavan in New Delhi, Shivakumar declined to comment on the alleged power tussle. He said he won't talk about internal party matters, even if there was "good news"

"When there is good news, we don't talk about it. It's Sunday, a good day.... We do not disclose or discuss anything related to such matters, including leadership change," Shivakumar said.

He also quipped that the media has become like the party's High Command.

"You in the media have now become the High Command. You discuss everything, follow everything and judge everything," Shivakumar told reporters. He was recently been appointed the Congress' observer for the Assam polls, and was in Delhi to meet with party leaders. *—ANI*

'NEVER DID SO WHEN IN POWER'

BJP has no right to demand CBI probe into Ballari clash: CM

MYSURU, 18 JAN

> **BJP does not believe in democracy, they believe in dictatorship**
>
> -Siddaramaiah, Chief Minister

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah hit back at BJP leaders for demanding a CBI probe into the Ballari clash.

BJP leaders have no moral right to demand a CBI probe, Siddaramaiah said in Mysuru on Sunday.

"How many cases did they hand over to the CBI when they were in power and we were in the opposition? If they didn't, then what moral right do they have to make such demands?" Siddaramaiah said. "During my previous tenure as Chief Minister, I gave many cases to the CBI, including the accusation against the then home minister KJ George (in a DySP suicide case), the lottery case and the suspicious death of Soujanya in Dharmasthala in Dakshina Kannada district."

The Chief Minister also condemned the BJP for defending the clash between BJP and Congress workers over the installation of a Valmiki Banner. He alleged that the Opposition leaders have forgotten why courts had prevented MLA Janardhan Reddy from entering Ballari.

"BJP has forgotten who is responsible for the Republic of Ballari," Siddaramaiah said, in an jab at Janardhan and his alleged link to the mining mafia. Siddaramaiah claimed that Janardhan even prevented him from campaigning in Ballari.

On the arrest of an Excise Deputy Commissioner allegedly caught accepting a Rs 20 lakh bribe, the CM said his government would not shield anyone involved in corruption. When reporters pointed to the Excise Minister's name being mentioned, Siddaramaiah said he was not aware of it.

Later, Siddaramaiah inaugurated projects worth laid the foundation stone for development projects worth Rs 324.04 crore worth projects at Kupya village in Varuna assembly segment. *—Salar News*

State ranks second in agri scheme execution

BENGALURU, 18 JAN

The Union Ministry of Agriculture on Sunday awarded the State government a Certificate of Commendation for securing the second rank among 'large states' for its overall performance in implementing the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY).

According to Karnataka government authorities, out of 27,04,166 farmers who were enrolled under the scheme, 11,85,642 farmers have claimed crop insurance compensation amounting to Rs 2,094 crore.

The certificate recognises the State's effective execution of the central crop insurance scheme during the Kharif 2024 and Rabi 2024-25 seasons.

The Chief Minister's Office shared the certificate issued by Muktanand Agrawal, Chief Executive Officer of the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana, dated 14 January.

The ministry recognised the efforts of the State government and its officers for the effective implementation of the crop insurance scheme, which aims to provide financial protection to farmers against crop losses.

The PMFBY is a Central flagship scheme designed to support farmers by ensuring timely compensation for crop damage due to natural calamities, pests and diseases, while also encouraging the adoption of modern agricultural practices. *—PTI*

AFTER 4 YEARS

Statue of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose being reinstalled in front of Vidhana Soudha. The statue was removed from the building's western gate due to work relating to the Namma Metro in Bengaluru. Netaji's birthday will be celebrated across India on 23 January *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

JD(S)' MAHESH MAY CONTEST CHAMUNDESHWARI SEAT INSTEAD OF GTD

MYSURU, 18 JAN

JD(S) MLC CN Manjegowda on Sunday said that former minister and State Working President Sa Ra Mahesh is likely to be the party's candidate for Chamundeshwari in the 2028 assembly polls. The seat is currently held by GT Devegowda, who has reportedly kept away from party activities. Manjegowda told reporters that the final decision will be taken at a meeting chaired by party supremo HD Deve Gowda in Bengaluru. He also criticised GT Devegowda's alleged anti-party conduct, noting that he did not support JD(S) candidates in various cooperative elections. Manjegowda said he and other party leaders would highlight these concerns to the high command at the forthcoming state-level meeting. *—Salar News*

Conditional nod given for matches at Chinnaswamy: HM

BENGALURU, 18 JAN

After the RCB stampede on 4 June, which claimed 11 lives, people questioned the safety around Chinnaswamy Stadium *PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA*

Permission to hold cricket matches at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium has been granted only on conditional basis, subject to strict compliance with prescribed safety norms, Home Minister G Parameshwara said here on Sunday.

Speaking to reporters here, Parameshwara said a high-level committee was constituted based on the recommendations of the Justice John Michael Cunha Committee to examine the stadium.

"The committee conducted a detailed inspection and submitted its report. Based on that report, permission has been granted to the Karnataka State Cricket Association (KSCA) to organise matches," he said.

Parameshwara said several conditions have been imposed on the KSCA. "All modifications measures recommended by the committee must be done. The KSCA has already begun work and has given a written assurance that all changes will be carried out."

Reiterating that the approval was conditional, he added that the stadium would be inspected again before matches are held.

He said a committee headed by GBA Chief Commissioner M Maheshwar Rao was also formed to assess the conditions, and its report had been taken into account. *— PTI*

2 arrested in Bihar for massive Mysuru theft

BHAGALPUR/ DARBHANGA, 18 JAN

Two people accused in a high-value robbery case in Karnataka were arrested in Bihar following coordinated raids by the Bihar Special Task Force (STF) and Karnataka police, officials said on Sunday.

The accused are Hrishikesh Singh, a resident of Darbhanga, and Pankaj Kumar alias Satua from Bhagalpur. They were wanted in connection with a robbery at a jewellery and diamond shop in Hunsur town of Mysuru district.

According to a statement by the Bihar police, the arrests were carried out on Friday during joint operations conducted across several police station limits in Darbhanga and Bhagalpur districts. Cases had been registered against the duo at the Hunsur police station on 28 December last year under provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) and the Arms Act.

Police recovered a stolen gold chain, a stolen gold ring, Rs 1 lakh in cash, a motorcycle and a jewellery storage case from the accused.

Kumar has an extensive criminal history, with 16 cases registered against him across Bihar, Jharkhand, Karnataka and Rajasthan. These include charges of attempt to murder, robbery, dacoity and offences under the Arms Act.

Singh also has multiple criminal cases, with four cases registered against him in Purnea, Naugachia and at the Hunsur police station, involving charges of murder, robbery, dacoity and Arms Act violations. *—PTI*

Four of a family drown in Bhadra canal in Shivamogga

SHIVAMOGGA, 18 JAN

Four members of a family drowned after slipping into the Bhadra canal near Arabailachi Camp in Shivamogga district on Sunday afternoon. According to Arabailachi Police Inspector Shivaprasad, the incident occurred when the family had gone to the canal to wash clothes. One of them reportedly slipped and fell into the water, following which others jumped in one after another in an attempt to rescue the victim and were swept away. The deceased were Neelabai, 55; her son Ravi Kumar; daughter Shwetha, and son-in-law Parashuram. Police and emergency services rushed to the spot and conducted rescue operations retrieving four bodies from the canal. A case has been registered, police said. *—Salar News*

GREEN CONCERNS

Cubbon walkers oppose skating rink inside park

BENGALURU, 18 JAN

The CPWA noted that there was a high-quality skating rink just across Cubbon Park in Kanteerava Stadium *PHOTO: ANI*

The Cubbon Park Walkers' Association (CPWA) expressed its strong opposition to the proposed construction of a skating rink inside Cubbon Park's Bal Bhavan.

In a statement on Sunday, the Association demanded that the State government halts any plans involving a new permanent structure or the concretisation of the park.

The State government had earlier proposed to build a skating rink at the cost of Rs 1.5 crore across approximately half an acre of land in Cubbon Park. The construction was set to begin by the end of January, and complete by May or June, making it the first State government owned skating park.

However, the CPWA noted that there was a high-quality skating rink just across Cubbon Park in Kanteerava Stadium.

The Association stated that the rink would further the concretisation of one of Bengaluru's crucial green lungs, causing "significant environmental harm".

"Every square metre of concrete laid is a square metre of earth lost to the city's ecosystem," the CPWA stated. It noted that Cubbon Park was a vital carbon sink and a sanctuary for local flora and fauna.

The walkers demanded that the State government withdraws the proposal for the skating rink at Bal Bhavan, commit to a total ban on new concrete structures within the park and recognises and protects Cubbon Park as a sensitive ecological zone.

"Our stance is clear: Cubbon Park must be protected in its natural state," said S Umesh, President of the CPWA. "We cannot allow the park to be treated as a vacant plot for construction. We must prioritise the preservation of our environment over redundant sporting infrastructure that already exists nearby." *—Salar News*

- State government had earlier proposed to build a skating rink at the cost of Rs 1.5 crore around half an acre of land in Cubbon Park. The construction was set to begin by the end of January, and complete by May or June, making it the first State government owned skating park.

21-yr-old ends life over online betting debts in Bagalkot

BAGALKOT, 18 JAN

A 21-year-old student allegedly died by suicide after being unable to cope with mounting debts incurred through online betting in Jamkhandi taluk of Bagalkot district in north Karnataka on Saturday night.

Jamkhandi police identified the deceased as Ramesh Bantanur, who was reportedly addicted to online betting for nearly five years where he lost huge money that was cleared by his father. His addiction allegedly pushed his family into severe financial distress, with about Rs 5 lakh paid over time to financial societies, private moneylenders, and acquaintances from whom he had borrowed money.

Inspector Mallappa Maddi said, his father had cleared his son's debts on twice by borrowing funds himself. Police stated that persistent harassment by moneylenders and mounting financial pressure pushed him into severe mental distress. *—SALAR NEWS*

Help is available. Please call Tele Manas at 14416, or SAHAI at 080-25497777 for support.

STINKY CITY

A garbage mound on the busy ring road near Kadirenahalli junction hampers pedestrians and motorists as it spills onto the City's road on Sunday *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

Ex-CPI(M) MLA S Rajendran joins BJP

T'PURA, 18 JAN

Former CPI(M) MLA S Rajendran joined the BJP on Sunday, receiving party membership from state president Rajeev Chandrasekhar. A veteran leader from Idukki, Rajendran represented the Devikulam Assembly constituency from 2006 to 2021. He said he had been inactive in politics for four to five years but continued public work, and that his decision was influenced by plantation and workers' issues as well as admiration for Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Rajendran emphasised he had never acted against his previous party. Three other leaders, including CPI's Gurunadan and CPI(M)'s Santhosh, also joined the BJP.

Chandrasekhar said the party would address unresolved issues in Munnar and Idukki and thanked Modi for three new trains to Kerala, promising a campaign focused on development, security, and protection of faith. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

CM Fadnavis meets US ambassador Gor for trade talks

MUMBAI, 18 JAN

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis held wide-ranging talks with US Ambassador to India, Sergio Gor, to strengthen ties between the state and the United States, focusing on boosting investment and expanding business links. The discussions took place at the Chief Minister's official residence in Mumbai on Saturday and were also attended by US Consul General Michael Schreuder, Fadnavis said in a post on X. Both sides explored ways to increase US investment in Maharashtra and support state-based firms seeking to expand in the US market. Fadnavis briefed the delegation on the state's flagship projects, including the Navi Mumbai International Education City. He added that both parties agreed to work more closely to deepen the US–Maharashtra partnership. *—PTI*

2 more Naxalites killed in Chh'garh encounter

BIJAPUR, 18 JAN

A day after four Naxalites were killed in an encounter with security forces in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district, two more Maoist cadres were neutralised during the same operation in the region on Sunday, said police. The latest exchange of fire occurred in the morning in the forested hills of the district's north-western region, where a joint team of security forces has been conducting an anti-Naxalite operation, Bijapur Superintendent of Police Jitendra Yadav said. Four Maoists were killed during the same operation on Saturday. They were identified as senior cadre Dilip Vedja, who was a divisional committee member, area committee members Madvi Kosa and Lakkhi Madkam, and party member Radha Metta. On 3 January, a total of 14 Maoists were gunned in two separate encounters. *—PTI*

Stalin unveils non-Hindi Literature Award

CHENNAI, 18 JAN

Chief Minister MK Stalin on Sunday announced an annual Literature Award for best works in languages including Tamil, Telugu, Bengali and Marathi. The award, under the auspices of the state government, will carry Rs 5 lakh cash prize, he said, adding it is named as "Semmozhi Illakiya Virudhu (Classical Language Literature Award)." In the first phase, awards will be for the best works in the languages of Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, Odiya, Bengali and Marathi. *—PTI*

Beed woman taken to Pimpri to cast vote

She tells cops that several others from Beed were taken in 4 buses to Pimpri Chinchwad

The woman was unaware about voting and was told she was being taken for a 'self-help group meet' ***PHOTO: REPRESENTATIONAL***

BEED, 18 JAN

A woman from Maharashtra's Beed district has approached the police, claiming that she was taken to Pimpri Chinchwad and made to "vote" for a particular party in the 15 January civic polls there, an official said on Saturday.

The woman, who submitted a complaint to the Beed superintendent of police, alleged that she was unaware of the voting process as she had been told she was being taken to a self-help group meeting and to the Khandoba temple at Jejuri in Pune district.

According to the woman, who is from Gevrai taluka, several women from Beed district were taken on four buses to Pimpri Chinchwad.

The woman said she "cast her vote" but was also caught by the police and was released after 6pm on the voting day.

"I have filed a complaint against a woman and have requested the police to register a case against her for cheating me," she said, adding that she did not receive any money.

Beed Superintendent of Police Navneet Kanwat confirmed that they had received such a complaint. "We will send the complaint to the Pune collector for further action," the official said. *—PTI*

Sena candidate won seat by one vote

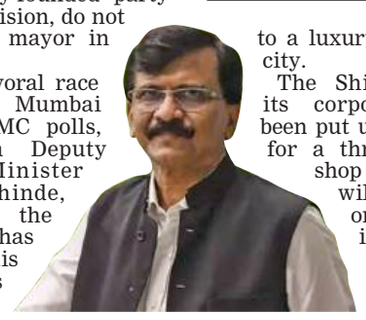
The poll in Ward 1A of Parbhani Municipal Corporation in Maharashtra got as close as possible with a Shiv Sena (UBT) candidate winning by a margin of just one vote, the verdict lending itself nicely to the oft-repeated electoral cliché that voting matters as every vote counts. Vyankat Dahale of the Uddhav Thackeray-led party bagged 4312 votes, just ahead of the 4311 votes garnered by his BJP rival Prasad Nagare, an official said on Sunday. Shiv Sena candidate Mohan Sonawane got 1363 votes in the ward, while 113 electors opted for None Of The Above (NOTA), he added. *—PTI*

SHIV SENA DOESN'T WANT BJP MAYOR, SAYS RAUT

MUMBAI, 18 JAN

- As the mayoral race heats up in Mumbai after the BMC polls, Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, who heads the Shiv Sena, has moved 29 of his corporators to a luxury hotel in the city.

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader **Sanjay Raut** claimed on Sunday that many newly elected Shiv Sena corporators, who originally belonged to the Bal Thackery-founded party before its division, do not want a BJP mayor in Mumbai.



As the mayoral race heats up in Mumbai after the BMC polls, Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, who heads the Shiv Sena, has moved 29 of his corporators to a luxury hotel in the city.

The Shiv Sena said its corporators have been put up at the hotel for a three-day workshop where Shinde will guide them on the functioning of the BMC.

When asked whether there will be a "ghar wapsi" (return) of corporators, Raut said, "Many new corporators are originally Shiv Sainiks (of undivided Shiv Sena). Our understanding is that everyone wants a BJP mayor not to be elected."

Even Shinde does not want a BJP mayor in Mumbai, Raut claimed. *—PTI*

22 BJP candidates allege Rana moved against party

NAGPUR, 18 JAN

22 BJP candidates in the just concluded Amravati Municipal Corporation polls have written to Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, demanding expulsion of former MP Navneet Rana for allegedly campaigning against the party.

Out of the 22 complainants, two won, while 20 lost the civic polls held on 15 January.

They claimed that former Amravati Lok Sabha MP Navneet Rana aggressively dubbed the saffron party nominees as "dummies" and promoted contestants of her husband Ravi Rana's Yuva Swabhiman Party as the "real BJP candidates".

Navneet Rana ***PHOTO: PTI***

Ahead of the civic polls, the BJP and MLA Ravi Rana's Yuva Swabhiman Party had broken their alliance. A local BJP leader had, however, said that Navneet Rana will continue to campaign for the saffron party candidates. In the previous election, the BJP had won 45 seats and the Yuva Swabhiman Party got 3 seats.

Aggrieved by the defeat of 20 BJP candidates, both the losers and the two winners on Saturday wrote a letter to CM Devendra Fadnavis, alleging their loss was caused not by the people but by Navneet Rana. *—PTI*

India will remain Vishwaguru if guided by dharma: Bhagwat

MUMBAI, 18 JAN

RSS Chief Mohan Bhagwat has emphasised that dharma is the guiding principle of all creation and key to India's unique spiritual heritage. Speaking at events during the RSS centenary celebrations, he said dharma is not limited to religion but governs every aspect of life.

"Water has its dharma to flow, fire its dharma to burn. Every being has inherent duty and discipline," he explained.

Bhagwat asserted that as long as Bharat is guided by dharma, it will remain Vishwaguru. He stressed humility in service, warning against ego and pride, and noted that spiritual leaders must be protected, as they are the true guides of society. "We are guardians, not leaders; the spiritual people are the real leaders," he said.

Addressing caste discrimination, he urged people to first erase caste from the mind.

RSS Chief Mohan Bhagwat during 'Vihar Sevak Urja Milan' event, in Mumbai, on Sunday ***PHOTO: PTI***

"If this is done sincerely, caste discrimination can be eradicated within 10 to 12 years," he said.

He highlighted that the organisation focuses on nation-building through individual character development, not competition or self-promotion. *—PTI*

'A REGULAR PRACTICE'

Minister says AIADMK's poll vows a photocopy of DMK schemes

CHENNAI, 18 JAN

Tamil Nadu Minister **TRB Rajaa** has flayed the opposition AIADMK, dismissing their newly announced poll promises as mere "stickers" pasted over existing DMK government initiatives.

Th Minister for Industries claimed that the AIADMK has a regular practice of "photocopying" the DMK manifesto.

"In every election, the DMK's manifesto stands out as a hero. The AIADMK simply copies DMK's manifesto and release it as their own," he said.

He called the opposition party's latest announcements as a "duplicate report" of the schemes already active under Chief Minister MK Stalin's 'Dravidian Model' government.

Referring to the manifesto released by the DMK during the 2021 elections, Rajaa said Edapadi K Palaniswami had argued that the promises could not be fulfilled because of the financial situation of the State.

"Our Chief Minister has not only advanced Tamil Nadu across all sectors, but has also successfully implemented every single thing the Opposition leader said could not be done," he said.

The Minister's reaction follows the announcement made by Palaniswami during party founder MG Ramachandran' anniversary on 17 January.

Palaniswami's poll promises include a monthly financial assistance of Rs 2,000 to every family ration card holder, free bus rides for men travelling in city buses, among others. *—PTI*

Vijay to appear before CBI again

TVK chief Vijay left for Delhi on Sunday to appear before the CBI on 19 January in connection with the Karur stampede case. The actor-turned politician left by a chartered plane for the national capital by 4.15pm, airport officials said. Vijay, who was questioned at the CBI headquarters here on 12 January for more than six hours, was asked to come again on the following day, but the actor sought another date, citing the harvest festival Pongal. *—PTI*

UAE President Al Nahyan set to visit India on Monday

NEW DELHI, 18 JAN

Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), is set to visit India on Monday to explore new avenues for enhancing the comprehensive strategic partnership between the two nations.

His visit comes at a time of heightened tensions in the Middle East, marked by deteriorating Iran-US relations, ongoing conflicts in Yemen, and instability in Gaza. Discussions during the visit are anticipated to focus on trade, investment, defence cooperation, and energy initiatives.

Following an invitation from Prime Minister Narendra Modi, this will be President Al Nahyan's third official trip to India since he took office and his fifth visit in the past decade.

Bilateral trade and people-to-people connections have seen a notable increase since the signing of a comprehensive economic partnership agreement (CEPA) in 2022. The visit is expected to build on the momentum generated by high-level exchanges, including the recent visit of Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Khaled bin Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan to India in September 2024 and Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum's visit in April last year.

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) emphasised that "India and the UAE share warm, close, and multi-faceted relations, underpinned by strong political, cultural, and economic ties." *—PTI*

Over 100 Dehradun schools found dilapidated, to be razed

DEHRADUN, 18 JAN

Over 100 government school buildings in the Dehradun district have been found to be in a dilapidated state, with 96 deemed completely or partially unfit for use and set to be demolished imminently.

This decision follows an assessment requested by Dehradun District Magistrate (DM) Savin Bansal, who sought a report from the Education Department.

The findings revealed that 104 school buildings are in poor condition.

According to Bansal, 79 of these structures, comprising 13 secondary and 66 primary schools, are completely unfit for use.

Alternative arrangements have already been made for 63 schools, while a substitute setup for 16 other schools is being organised.

Furthermore, 17 schools have been classified as partially unusable, with only specific structures designated for demolition.

Bansal reported that based on evaluations from the Public Works Department, a budget of Rs 1 crore has been approved to ensure timely demolition and the implementation of necessary safety measures.

He added that no demolition was deemed necessary for eight other schools.

Bansal assured that teaching would not occur in any hazardous school buildings and that the administration would act in a time-bound, transparent, and accountable manner. *—PTI*

Security personnel patrol railway tracks following protests over attacks on migrant workers, in the Beldanga, West Bengal ***PHOTO: PTI***

WB cops conduct marches in violence-hit Beldanga

KOLKATA, 18 JAN

Armed state police personnel, accompanied by Rapid Action Force, conducted route marches in violence-hit Beldanga in West Bengal's Murshidabad district on Sunday.

Shops remained closed and roads wore a deserted look following road blockades, stone pelting and assault on journalists on two consecutive days.

Police patrolled the town's main roads and bylanes and fanned out into nearby villages to prevent any gathering of people.

Violence erupted on 16 January during protests over the alleged unnatural death of a local migrant worker in Jharkhand. His family has alleged that he was killed by miscreants for speaking in Bengali. On 17 January, similar protests occurred against the alleged attack on another migrant labourer from the district in Bihar. A total of 30 people have been arrested.

Murshidabad TMC MP Yusuf Pathan also visited the residence of Alauddin Sheikh the migrant labourer from Beldanga. He said that the state government has taken up the matter with the Jharkhand CM's Office, seeking a probe into the incident. *—PTI*

J&K ON HIGH ALERT

'Crypto Hawala' is latest way to fund terror

SRINAGAR/NEW DELHI, 18 JAN

- For the 2024-25 fiscal year, only 49 exchanges have registered as legal reporting entities, prompting the government to come out with fresh guidelines that include a mandatory liveness detection and geographical tracking, besides asking users to take a "live selfie" using software that verifies their presence, typically through eye-blinking or head movement.

Security agencies have flagged a sophisticated "crypto hawala" network bypassing the country's financial safeguards to funnel untraceable foreign funds into Jammu and Kashmir, sparking grave concerns that the money is being used to support terror activities, officials said on Sunday.

This has put the security establishment on high alert, with officials warning that these shadow funds are intended to give a fresh lease of life to separatist elements and reignite the anti-national rhetoric within the Union Territory that had otherwise been virtually neutralised by a crackdown by police and central agencies, they said.

Mirroring the traditional hawala system, where money is sent through non-banking channels, this digital version uses the anonymity of unregulated cryptocurrency to erase the financial trail and inject cash into the domestic economy.

While India requires all Virtual Digital Asset Service Providers to register with the Financial Intelligence Unit, this shadow network operates entirely off the grid.

For the 2024-25 fiscal year, only 49 exchanges have registered as legal reporting entities, prompting the government to come out with fresh guidelines that include a mandatory liveness detection and geographical tracking, besides asking users to take a "live selfie" using software that verifies their presence, typically through eye-blinking or head movement.

The "penny-drop" method, which involves processing a nominal Re 1 transaction to confirm that the bank account is active and belongs to the registrant, is required.

In addition to a Permanent Account Number (PAN), users must provide a secondary ID, such as a Passport, Aadhaar or Voter ID, verified via OTP. *—PTI*

PHOTO: INSTAGRAM

India my home: Rahman on 'communal' remark

NEW DELHI, 18 JAN

Renowned music composer AR Rahman addressed the backlash from his recent interview in a video post on social media, emphasising that he never intended to cause pain. The 59-year-old artist, known for films like 'Roja' and 'Dil Se..', stated, "India is my inspiration, my teacher and my home," while expressing that his purpose is to uplift and serve through music. He remarked on the challenges in the industry due to a "power shift" and suggested that his work could be affected by a "communal thing," but reaffirmed, "I hope my sincerity is understood by everybody." *—PTI*

Indians biggest tourist group in Sri Lanka

COLOMBO, 18 JAN

Sri Lanka received 2.3 million tourists in 2025, with Indian travellers accounting for the largest share, according to figures released by the tourism authority. "India remains the undisputed source market, contributing 531,511 arrivals, more than double the next highest country. This reflects a remarkable year-on-year increase of over 114,000 visitors," an official statement issued by the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA) said on Saturday. The UK is the second-highest source with 21,277 arrivals. Indian arrivals averaged over 23 per cent per month, with December being the highest number with 56,715 arrivals. February was the lowest with only 35,000 Indians arriving. The total arrivals in December, 2,58,928, were the highest for the year. *—PTI*

PHOTO: INSTAGRAM

Singer B Praak gets death threat, caller demands Rs 10 cr

CHANDIGARH, 17 JAN

Singer B Praak has reportedly received a death threat from an alleged member of the Lawrence Bishnoi gang, demanding Rs 10 crore. The threat was conveyed through a voicemail message received by a friend of the singer, Dilnoor. "This is Arzoo Bishnoi speaking. Convey a message to B Praak that we want Rs 10 crore," the caller warned, adding that "if (he) cooperates, it is fine; otherwise, tell him we will bury him in dirt." Following Dilnoor's complaint, Mohali police registered an FIR under sections 308 (extortion) and 351 (criminal intimidation) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, and an investigation is currently underway. *—PTI*

Bird flu alert in Kerala's Iritty after crow deaths

KANNUR, 18 JAN

Authorities have confirmed the presence of the H5N1 avian influenza virus in Iritty, Kannur district, following the death of crows. The District Collector Arun K Vijayan has issued an alert for the region, instructing officials to enhance precautionary measures. So far, there have been no reports of the virus affecting domestic birds, and no culling is necessary at this time. The confirmation came from the Deputy Director of the Kannur Regional Diagnostic Laboratory. The Collector has mandated that any discovered carcasses be buried at an adequate depth with calcium carbonate, while health officials monitor for any unusual fevers or respiratory infections among local residents. *—PTI*

AAP's Sanjay among 8 booked for 'fake' videos

Videos show damages during work at Manikarnika Ghat

VARANASI, 18 JAN

Police here have registered eight FIRs against as many people, including AAP MP Sanjay Singh and Congress leaders Pappu Yadav and Jaswinder Kaur, for allegedly circulating AI-generated images, videos and misleading information on social media about the redevelopment work at the Manikarnika Ghat.

The ghat is among the oldest and most sacred cremation grounds in Hinduism. It is believed that getting cremated at the site helps one achieve 'moksha,' that is, liberation from the cycle of birth and death, giving the ghat immense religious importance.

Reacting to the FIR against him, AAP's Sanjay Singh claimed that the redevelopment had caused destruction at Manikarnika Ghat. Temples were damaged, and a statue of Ahilyabai Holkar was broken, he alleged. He accused the authorities of targeting him for raising the issue.

There have been protests against a demolition drive under the redevelopment plan of the ghat, with many alleging that a century-old idol of Ahilyabai Holkar has been damaged, a charge refuted by the district administration.

Policemen patrolling at the Manikarnika Ghat in Varanasi. The Ghat is one of the most sacred cremation grounds in Hinduism. **PHOTO: PTI**

Deputy Commissioner of Police Gaurav Bansal said that eight cases have been lodged under the BNS against eight individuals and certain X handles for spreading fabricated content.

Police said fake, misleading videos and AI-generated images, allegedly linked to Hindu deities, were circulated on X with the intent to hurt religious sentiments and spread misinformation.

Assistant Commissioner of Police (ACP) Atul Anjan Tripathi said probes have revealed that a fabricated video regarding the Manikarnika Ghat, made with AI and by manipulating facts, has gone viral on social media.

A complaint was lodged by Mano, a resident of Tamil Nadu, whose company has been executing the work to strengthen cremation facilities and beautify Manikarnika Ghat.

According to the complaint, an X user allegedly shared AI-generated and misleading images on January 16, presenting distorted facts and misleading Hindu devotees.

- Reacting to the FIR against him, AAP's Sanjay Singh claimed that the redevelopment had caused destruction at the Manikarnika Ghat. Temples were damaged, and a statue of Ahilyabai Holkar was broken, he added

DCP Bansal claimed false information was circulated to not only hurt religious sentiments but also to fan anti-government sentiments. "Legal action is being taken against the social media handles concerned as well as those amplifying the content," he added.

Opposition parties, including the Congress, have accused "the Yogi-Modi government" of "completely destroying" the heritage of Varanasi and demanded that the ongoing work at Manikarnika Ghat be immediately stopped, with any further action only after consultation with religious leaders there. *— PTI*

VIDEO ON SOCIAL MEDIA

12 held in UP for 'namaz' in empty house 'sans nod'

BAREILLY, 18 JAN

Police detained 12 people in a village in Bareilly district for allegedly conducting 'namaz' at an empty house "without permission," officials said on Sunday.

A video purportedly showing people conducting prayers inside the house has surfaced and is being circulated on social media, they said.

SP (South) Anshika Verma said police took precautionary action after receiving information from people in Mohammadganj village that a vacant house is allegedly being used as a temporary madrasa for the past several weeks.

"Conducting any new religious activity or gathering without permission is a violation of the law. Strict action will be taken if such things are repeated," she said, appealing to people to maintain peace and law and order.

Police said the 12 detained persons were fined under BNS sections on breach of peace and were later produced before a magistrate, who granted them bail. Attempts are underway to trace three other persons who are absconding.

A view of people attending the namaz at the house **PHOTO: SCREENGRAB**

Police said preliminary inquiry revealed that the vacant house belongs to one Hanif, and was being used temporarily for Friday namaz.

No written permission or valid documents could be produced when sought by the authorities, they said.

Police said some villagers had objected to the prayers being held regularly at the house without permission and informed the authorities, following which the police stopped the gathering.

The online video is being examined, the police officials added. *— PTI*

CJI to check SOP plea on freezing accounts

NEW DELHI, 18 JAN

The Supreme Court has directed that a plea seeking directions to the Centre and the RBI to formulate a Standard Operating Procedure governing freezing and de-freezing of bank accounts during cybercrime probes should be placed before the Chief Justice of India, Surya Kant.

A bench of Justices Pankaj Mithal and SVN Bhatti directed the SC registry to seek instructions from the CJI and place the matter accordingly before the appropriate bench after it was informed by the Centre that the CJI-led bench was already hearing a suo moto matter regarding digital arrests, where the same issue is under consideration.

"Anil Kaushik, ASG, submits that as far as prayers 'B' and 'C' are concerned, they are being considered by another SC bench. So the registry should obtain appropriate orders

from the CJI," the SC said in its order on 16 January.

The court had earlier agreed to examine prayer 'B' of the plea stating that no bank account shall be frozen without a written order and intimation to the account holder within 24 hours of such action and every freezing order shall be reported to the jurisdictional magistrate.

The plea also sought the issuance of guidelines to all investigating agencies to ensure that no bank account is frozen without a written order and intimation to the account holder within 24 hours of such action. *— PTI*

Wangchuk's detention illegal, says his wife

NEW DELHI, 18 JAN

Gitanjali Angmo, wife of climate activist and educator Sonam Wangchuk, has described her husband's detention under the National Security Act (NSA) as reflecting the state of democracy in India, calling it an "illegal" use of power. She alleged the case has "no merit" and criticised repeated delays by the government in providing responses to the courts, saying Wangchuk should have already been released due to procedural lapses.

Wangchuk, a Magsaysay Award winner, was arrested on 26 September, two days after protests in Ladakh demanding statehood and Sixth Schedule status left four people dead and 90 injured. He is currently lodged in Jodhpur jail. Angmo, who co-founded the Himalayan Institute of Alternatives, Ladakh (HIAL) with him, has filed a habeas corpus petition seeking his release. She said authorities delayed providing key documents, including videos forming the basis of the detention,

violating lating Sections 8 and 11 of the NSA. Angmo also highlighted flaws in the grounds of detention, noting some relied on videos over a year old, and that several FIRs did not even name Wangchuk. She criticised the district magistrate's order as a "copy-paste" of police proposals.

She called for stronger public opposition to the detention. Angmo added that while delays have affected new projects at HIAL and SECMOL, the increased awareness of their work is a positive outcome. *— PTI*

'Illegal' Goa nightclub where 25 died was flagged in 2024

PANAJI, 18 JAN

The Goa government has told the legislative Assembly that the 'Birch by Romeo Lane' nightclub, where 25 persons died in a fire last month, had been flagged for illegal building construction by revenue officials in 2024.

Revenue Minister Atanasio Monserratte, in a written reply to the House on Friday, attached documents that show the club was constructed by demolishing the traditional sluice gate inside the salt pan by illegally converting the land.

The original owners of the property, Pradeep Ghadi Amonkar and Sunil Divkar, had filed a complaint before the Bardez taluka mamlatdar (revenue officer) on 21 December 2023.

The complaint was filed against the then Maizon Lake View Resort (later named as the Birch by Romeo Lane after it was leased out to Saurabh and Gaurav Luthra).

A file photo of the 'Birch By Romeo Lane' nightclub which was destroyed in a fire in December 2025 **PHOTO: ANI**

The complainants had signed an agreement for sale with Surinder Khosla, the resort proprietor.

Their complaint said that a building was being constructed without conversion of land and change of zone. It alleged that there was construction on the tenanted land and the " sluice gate was demolished."

The complaint also pointed out that the establishment was "discharging sewage into the Baga River."

The documents, tabled by the minister, also showed that the complainants had mentioned that the nightclub was being operated in an "unsafe structure which could cause a major tragedy." The complaint also mentioned that there was "misuse of open spaces."*— PTI*

Bomb threat forces IndiGo flight to land in Lucknow

LUCKNOW, 18 JAN

An IndiGo Airlines flight en route from Delhi to Bagdogra, West Bengal made an emergency landing at the Lucknow airport on Sunday morning following a bomb threat.

Bomb disposal squads, security agencies and airport authorities conducted thorough security check of the IndiGo flight 6E-6650 carrying 222 passengers, besides two pilots and five crew members.

They were safely evacuated and the aircraft was immediately parked in an isolation bay.

Air Traffic Control (ATC) received information at around 8.46 am about a bomb threat.

A handwritten note on a tissue paper bearing the words "Plane mein bomb" (bomb in the plane) was found, police said.

The police are investigating the matter. *—PTI*

PARENTS SEEK PROBE INTO TRAINEE KABADDI PLAYER'S DEATH

T'PURAM, 18 JAN

Parents of a trainee kabaddi player, who, along with another athlete, was found hanging dead at a Sports Authority of India (SAI) hostel in Kollam, have demanded an investigation in the incident.

Sandra A, 18, a native of Chaliyam in Kerala's Kozhikode, and Vyshnavi, 15 of Muthakkal in Thiruvananthapuram were found hanging in their hostel room on 15 January.

Vyshnavi's father, Venu said that the family does not believe his daughter committed suicide.

Vyshnavi had contacted Venu before the incident to inform him about winning a competition and ask money to buy Sharjah Shake. A suicide note recovered from the scene mentioned that the warden "knows everything."

The police are currently probing the matter. *— PTI*

FERTILITY SCAM

Two women arrested for illegal egg donation racket

MUMBAI, 18 JAN

Sahar police arrested two women at the Mumbai International Airport after immigration officials uncovered an alleged illegal egg donation and surrogacy racket operating from Thane.

Sunoti Belel, 44, one of the accused, allegedly provided unmarried women as egg suppliers to fertility centres in India and abroad. Such women were shown as married using forged documents, as an unmarried woman cannot donate her eggs under Indian law.

Belel, a Kalyan resident, was detained after arriving from Bangkok at around 1.30 pm on Friday. About 30 minutes later, another woman passenger, Seema Vinzarat, 29, a Thane resident, arrived from Bangkok and was also detained for questioning.

Immigration officer Vaibhav Bhosale stated in his complaint that he became

suspicious when Belel failed to give satisfactory answers about her travel purpose to Bangkok.

During interrogation, officials learnt that Vinzarat had accompanied Belel to Bangkok as a donor for egg donation tests and was allegedly paid a substantial amount for the trip.

Belel told police that she, along with absconding

- Sunoti Belel, 44, one of the accused, allegedly arranged unmarried women as egg suppliers to fertility centres. They were shown as married using forged documents, as a spinster cannot donate her eggs as per Indian law

accused Sangita Bagul, ran an agency named Elite Care in Thane which supplied egg donors and surrogate mothers to fertility centres in India and abroad.

She allegedly admitted to supplying unmarried women as egg donors by creating forged documents.

Under the Surrogacy (Regulation) Act, 2021, a woman must be married and have at least one child of her own to donate eggs. The Act also bans commercial surrogacy. *— PTI*

Man gets Rs 1.62 crore as accident compensation

NEW DELHI, 18 JAN

A Delhi Motor Accident Claims Tribunal has awarded over Rs 1.62 crore as compensation to a 21-year-old man, who suffered 53 per cent temporary disability in a road accident in July 2024.

On July 1, 2024, a bus hit Aryan Rana's scooty from behind, grievously injuring him.

The respondents had claimed false implication in the case. Furthermore, the conductor of the bus had stated that the petitioner's scooty was ahead of the offending bus, which collided with the vehicle while overtaking it.

The tribunal noted the petitioner had been medically certified as temporarily disabled.

He was a first year university student who could not continue his education due to the accident. *—PTI*

After 50 years, court closes Rs 7.65 theft case

MUMBAI, 18 JAN

Nearly 50 years after a theft of Rs 7.65, a Mumbai court has finally dropped the curtain on a 1977 cold case involving two unidentified suspects and a complainant who remained untraceable despite decades of police searches.

The Mazagaon court closed the 1977 case as part of its endeavour to dispose of old cases, where the accused have either died, remained unidentified or untraceable.

The 1977 theft case involved two unidentified men accused of stealing Rs 7.65, a significant sum five decades ago. However, the duo could not be traced despite non-bailable warrants.

Judicial Magistrate First Class (Mazagaon court) Aarti Kulkarni, closed the case on January 14 noting that the matter was nearly 50 years old.

It discharged the two accused booked under Section 379 (theft) of the Indian Penal Code, and directed that the stolen sum of Rs 7.65 be returned to the complainant.

Similarly, in a 30-year-old

- The 1977 theft case involved two unidentified men accused of stealing Rs 7.65, a significant sum five decades ago. However, the duo could not be traced despite NBWs

case, a magistrate court discharged an accused booked under the Indian Passport Act and Foreigners Act, noting that he had remained untraceable since 1995.

A 2003 rash driving case met a similar fate from a magistrate's court, as a police report confirmed that not only the accused, but the original informant and all witnesses, were no longer traceable. *— PTI*

MAUNI AMAVASYA

Over 3.82crore devotees took a holy dip in the Ganga River and at the Sangam on the occasion of 'Mauni Amavasya', the main bathing festival of the ongoing Magh Mela in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh. On the day of Mauni Amavasya, people practice rituals to honour their forefathers and ancestors
PHOTO: PTI

India set for power-packed presence at WEF meet

India is set for a power-packed representation at the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting in this Alpine resort town that will see the global elite discuss "a spirit of dialogue" in a fragmented world for five days beginning Monday.

US President Donald Trump will be the biggest star among over 3,000 global leaders from government, business, academia, multi-lateral bodies, civil society, and labour unions.

The WEF said at least 64 heads of government or state would be present, while six out of seven G-7 countries would be represented by their top leadership. China and Pakistan will also have big delegations attending the event.

Pakistan will also host for the first time a 'Sufi Night' where it will also serve 'Indus Valley' delicacies.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy will also be present, WEF President and CEO Borge Brende said at an online press conference, asserting that the five-day annual meeting beginning 18 January will have a hard look at Ukraine, Gaza and Latin America, including Venezuela.

President Trump will bring along the largest-ever US delegation to Davos, including at least five secretaries. Those expected include Secretary of State Marco Rubio, Secretary of the Treasury Scott Bessent, Secretary of Commerce Howard Lutnick, Secretary of Energy Chris Wright, and also US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer.

Brende said the world is probably facing the most complex geopolitical situation since 1945, and dialogue is not a luxury in times of uncertainty, but an urgent necessity today. Brende said the WEF Annual Meeting will have a historic participation of more than 3,000 world leaders from over 130 countries this year, including over 1,700 business leaders, half of whom are CEOs or chairpersons.

There would be a record number of 400 top political leaders from across the globe.

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis being welcomed for the WEF Annual Meeting in Davos, Switzerland
PHOTO: X/@DEV_FADNAVIS,@WEF

The meeting will also be attended by more than 30 foreign ministers, over 60 finance ministers and central bank governors and more than 30 trade ministers.

Top political leaders taking part include Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz, French President Emmanuel Macron, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, Chinese Vice-Premier He Lifeng, and Swiss President Guy Parmelin.

They also include presidents of Argentina, Indonesia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Colombia, Congo, Ecuador, Finland, Mozambique, Poland, Serbia, Singapore, Israel, and Syria, alongside prime ministers of Spain, Belgium, Greece, the Netherlands, Pakistan, the Palestinian National Authority, and Qatar.

Close to 200 leaders from civil society and the social sector, including labour unions, non-governmental and faith-based organisations, as well as experts and heads of the world's leading universities, research institutions and think tanks, will also participate in the meeting.

From India, at least four Union ministers — Ashwini Vaishnaw, Shivraj Singh Chouhan, Pralhad Joshi, and K Rammohan Naidu — as well as six chief ministers are expected to be there, along with over 100 top CEOs from the country.

The chief ministers are Devendra Fadnavis of Maharashtra, N Chandrababu Naidu of Andhra Pradesh, Assam's Himanta Biswa Sarma, Madhya Pradesh's Mohan Yadav, Telangana's A Revanth Reddy, and Jharkhand's Hemant Soren.

While Reddy is from Congress, Soren from Congress ally Jharkhand Mukti Morcha and Naidu from Telugu Desam Party (BJP ally), the other three CMs are from the BJP.

Karnataka's Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar (Congress) was also expected to be there, but has dropped out due to his engagements back home.

Among Union ministers, Naidu is from TDP, while the other four are from BJP.

Besides, Gujarat's Deputy Chief Minister Harsh Rameshbhai Sanghavi (BJP) and high-level delegations from Uttar Pradesh and Kerala will also visit Davos.

Indian leaders are expected to participate in several panel discussions, including one on 'Can India become the third largest economy in the world' during the summit.

Business leaders from India expected include Reliance Industries Chief Mukesh Ambani, Tata group's N Chandrasekaran, Bajaj Group's Sanjiv Bajaj, Jubilant Bhartia Group's Hari S Bhartia, TVS Motor's Sudarshan Venu and Mahindra Group's Anish Shah. Other Indian corporate leaders expected to be there are Axis Bank's Amitabh Chaudhry, Godrej Industries Group's Nadir Godrej, JSW Group's Sajjan Jindal, Zerodha's Nikhil Kamath, Bharti group's Sunil Bharti Mittal, Infosys co-founder Nandan Nilekani, Infosys CEO Salik S Parekh, Wipro's Rishad Premji, Essar CEO Prashant Ruia, Paytm's Vijay Shekhar Sharma and ReNew CEO Sumant Sinha.

Former Union minister Smriti Zubin Irani will also be there as founder and chairperson of Alliance for Global Good: Gender Equity and Equality, which was founded a few years ago in Davos itself.

Global leaders attending the summit include United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, World Bank President Ajay S Banga, IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva, European Central Bank President Christine Lagarde, WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, UNESCO Director General Khaled el-Enany, WTO Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala and London Mayor Sadiq Khan. *—PTI*

SALAR ساہر

COULD TRUMP'S BOARD OF PEACE RIVAL UN?

- President Donald Trump's "Board of Peace," which was initially seen as a mechanism focused on ending the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza, is taking shape with ambitions to have a far broader mandate of other global crises, potentially rivalling the United Nations in what would be a major upheaval to the post-World War II international order.

President Donald Trump's "Board of Peace," which was initially seen as a mechanism focused on ending the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza, is taking shape with ambitions to have a far broader mandate of other global crises, potentially rivalling the United Nations in what would be a major upheaval to the post-World War II international order.

In letters sent Friday to various world leaders inviting them to be "founding members" of the board, Trump says the body would "embark on a bold new approach to resolving global conflict."

Invitation letters from Trump to Argentine President Javier Milei and Paraguay's leader Santiago Pena, which were posted Saturday to their official social media accounts note that Trump's 20-point Gaza ceasefire plan, which includes the creation of the Board of Peace, was endorsed by the UN Security Council and indicates that the panel of world leaders may not confine their work to Gaza.

"Now it is time to turn all of these dreams into reality," Trump wrote. "At the heart of the plan is the Board of Peace, the most impressive and consequential board ever assembled, which will be established as a new International Organisation and Transitional Governing Administration."

Other leaders whose governments have confirmed receiving invitation letters include Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney, Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. It was not immediately clear how many or which other leaders would receive invitations.

Trump's apparent aspirations to turn to the Board of Peace into an international institution that could provide an alternative to the United Nations is sure to be controversial and opposed by numerous countries, including China and Russia, which hold veto power in the UN Security Council and have significant interests in opposing any radical change in the world order.

Smaller nations also are likely to have objections as the UN system has given them at least a voice in major international decisions since the end of the Second World War.

A senior US official said an expanded role for the Board of Peace remains "aspirational" but that Trump and his advisers believe it is possible, particularly as the US and others have repeatedly expressed frustration with the United Nations and its associated organisations, commissions and advisory boards.

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal Trump administration thinking, did not say the Board of Peace is intended to replace the United Nations but suggested that it could perhaps galvanise the world body into action.

The Trump administration has often been at odds with the United Nations as it zeroed in on eliminating billions of dollars in funding to international organisations and humanitarian assistance at large.

Trump and his allies have blasted the world body for not reaching its potential and for "bloated" and redundant agencies that push "woke" ideology.

The letters follow Trump's post on social media Thursday, saying the Board of Peace had been formed and that the names of its members would be announced "shortly." Officials say a formal announcement is expected to be made next week during the World Economic Forum meeting in Davos, Switzerland.

It comes after the White House on Friday evening released the names of some of the leaders who will play a role in overseeing next steps in Gaza, including an executive board that will work to carry out the vision of the Board of Peace.

Israel's government objected Saturday, saying it "was not coordinated with Israel and is contrary to its policy.

That executive committee includes Trump administration officials Secretary of State Marco Rubio and envoy Steve Witkoff as well as businesspeople like Apollo Global Management CEO Marc Rowan and others like former British Prime Minister Tony Blair and World Bank President Ajay Banga.

The White House did not respond to a request for comment Saturday on Trump's ambitions for the Board of Peace nor the letters posted by leaders.

The United Nations also did not immediately respond. *—PTI*

The Trump administration has often been at odds with the UN as it zeroed in on eliminating billions of dollars in funding to international organisations and humanitarian assistance at largen ***PHOTO: PTI***

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

In solitary jail cell, Wangchuk seeks comfort in company of books: Angmo

- The activist and educator has been lodged in the jail for over 110 days. He was arrested on 26 September and taken to jail soon after he ended his 15-day fast over the demands pertaining to the Sixth Schedule and statehood for Ladakh, as violence erupted in Leh, leading to the death of four people.

Cut off from the world in his solitary confinement in the Jodhpur jail, climate activist Sonam Wangchuk has turned his attention to a group of usually unremarkable visitors -- ants. Perhaps, he is drawn to the sense of solidarity and team spirit they display, his wife and HIAL co-founder Gitanjali Angmo says.

The activist and educator has been lodged in the jail for over 110 days. He was arrested on 26 September and taken to jail soon after he ended his 15-day fast over the demands pertaining to the Sixth Schedule and statehood for Ladakh, as violence erupted in Leh, leading to the death of four people.

Angmo says Wangchuk remains optimistic and hopeful; his confinement has not dampened his spirit. He is also writing a book about his experience there.

"So, the one good thing about positive and hopeful people is that they take everything in their stride. But the conditions he lives in are very dire, very difficult," Angmo told PTI during an interview.

Wangchuk has been sleeping on a blanket on the floor in a barrack devoid of furniture. He has been reading books, as he remains deprived of any communication with the outside world except interactions with his family and lawyers. Even the newspaper that Angmo brings for him has reports related to him cut out of it, the Himalayan Institute of Alternatives, Ladakh (HIAL) co-founder says.

The imprisoned climate activist and innovator has been doing Vipassana, yoga and meditation, and is content with the basic food that he gets. The family has been allowed to bring him some snacks and fruits, but the jail authorities do not allow dried apricots, a fruit Ladakh is known for.

When asked about Wangchuk's health, she says, "He is generally a very optimistic and hopeful person who sees the positive side of things. He makes the best of everything, and so he has made his life in jail a means for his progress. Just as I have made mine outside, running from pillar to post, a means of my progress," Angmo told PTI.

"For the first two months, we did not share the problems we were going through with each other. We presented a strong front. Only recently, he told us he does not have a bed or any furniture," she says.

Wangchuk is sleeping on the floor on some blankets, and he has very little space to do his walks.

"I gave him Sri Aurobindo's recount of his detention in Alipore jail, to make him feel that even somebody like him has gone to jail, in addition to people like Mahatma Gandhi, Nehru and others. But while giving him the book, I joked that just like Sri Aurobindo's enlightenment inside the jail, you should be a self-realised person when you come out. He said he would try his best," Angmo says.

Gitanjali Angmo says Sonam Wangchuk remains optimistic and hopeful; his confinement has not dampened his spirit
PHOTO: PTI

The book he's writing on his jail experience is likely to be titled 'Forever Positive'.

"If he observes some ants and their behaviour, he asks me to get books on ant behaviour because the ant community has a lot of solidarity, a lot of team spirit. So, maybe he wants to study that," she says.

According to Angmo, he wanted books on sundials, as he didn't have a watch for a long time.

Wanghuk is not allowed to have any devices, including mechanical watches.

"No phone, no television, even the newspapers that I gave to him have things that pertain to him or to Ladakh cut out. So, when he sees the newspaper with those cuttings, he knows he must have featured there that day, or it must have been about Ladakh," Angmo says.

According to her, the jail authorities have been nice to them "to the extent possible", and some of the staff even approached him with queries related to the education of their children.

Wangchuk's only interactions in the jail are with the constables or staff who give him food.

"But even with them, he has struck a good bond. They ask him about parenting tips for their children, about educational insights," she says.

Angmo said they were allowed to give him some fruits and snacks, but were not allowed to give him the sun-dried apricots, a specialty of Ladakh.

"He has asked me many times to bring him sun-dried apricots, but they didn't allow it. But they do let him receive some homemade snacks and all of that, which is very nice of them," she says.

The food given in the jail remains basic -- dal, chawal and sabzi, according to Angmo.

Additionally, Angmo has said his arrest reflects the state of democracy in the country, where power is used to "illegally detain" people, and the case has "no merit" as fresh dates are repeatedly sought by the government in court.

In an interview with PTI, Angmo alleged that Wangchuk should already be out of prison considering "procedural lapses" by authorities, saying it is an "open and shut case".

Angmo said she was, however, "a bit disappointed" the detention has not faced stronger pushback.

"We cannot afford to be silent," she said, calling for a collective and louder opposition to his arrest. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

US airstrike in Syria kills Al-Qaeda affiliate leader

FLORIDA, 18 JAN

The US military killed a senior Al-Qaeda-affiliated leader with direct links to the ISIS ambush that targeted American soldiers in Syria in December in a strike carried out in the country's northwest region. The US Central Command (CENTCOM) said in a statement that the US forces conducted the strike on 16 January, resulting in the death of Bilal Hasan al-Jasim, a terrorist leader with direct links to an ISIS operative responsible for a deadly ambush on US personnel. "The death of a terrorist operative linked to the deaths of three Americans demonstrates our resolve in pursuing terrorists who attack our forces," CENTCOM Commander Admiral Brad Cooper said. *—ANI*

Inmates take guards hostage in 3 Guatemalan jails

GUATEMALA CITY, 18 JAN

Several dozen Guatemalan prison guards were being held hostage by inmates in three prisons on Saturday following apparently coordinated disturbances, authorities said. Interior Minister Marco Antonio Villeda said he was willing to talk with the inmates, but would not accede to their demands in seeking the release of the 46 guards. Villeda said in a statement that the inmate uprising was a direct result of the prison administrators' decision to strip privileges from some imprisoned gang leaders. "We don't negotiate with terrorists nor with organised crime," the statement said. "We also don't allow groups that have sown fear to impose their conditions." National Police were deployed around the affected prisons. There were no reports of injuries or deaths. *—PTI*

Taiwan scribe 'bribed' military to leak intel to China

TAIPEI, 18 JAN

A journalist in Taiwan was detained Saturday on allegations of bribing army officers to give military information to people from mainland China, as the self-ruled island cracks down on potential infiltration from China. Taiwan's Qiaotou District Prosecutors Office said in a statement that a district court ordered the detention of a television reporter, surnamed Lin, and five military officers. The identity of the journalist is from CTi TV' statement on the detention of its reporter Lin Chen-you. Prosecutors accuse the journalist of paying up to tens of thousands of Taiwan dollars (tens to hundreds of US dollars) to current military officers in exchange for their providing information to "Chinese individuals." *—PTI*

Indonesia finds plane wreckage after 11 missing

JAKARTA, 18 JAN

Indonesian rescuers have recovered wreckage from a missing aircraft believed to have crashed on Saturday, carrying 11 people, while approaching a mountainous region on Sulawesi island during poor weather. The turboprop ATR 42-500, operated by Indonesia Air Transport, disappeared from radar shortly after takeoff from Yogyakarta to Makassar. On a maritime surveillance mission, carrying eight crew members and three passengers from the Marine Affairs and Fisheries Ministry. Muhammad Arif Anwar, head of Makassar Search and Rescue Office, said, "The discovery of the aircraft's main sections significantly narrows the search zone." Rescue teams faced challenges, including strong winds and heavy fog, as efforts continued to locate any survivors in a steep forested area. *—PTI*

US-EU trade deal on pause after Trump's tariff threat

Europe unites after US Prez says they must sell Greenland

BRUSSELS/WASHINGTON, 18 JAN

After President Donald Trump threatened to impose 25 per cent tariffs on European countries if Denmark didn't "sell" Greenland to the US, the European Union said that the EU-US trade deal is paused.

Vice President of the European People's Party, Siegfried Muresan, said, "We were supposed to ratify the EU-US trade deal from last July very soon, reducing tariffs for imports from the US into the European Union to 0 per cent.

However, this ratification will have to wait a little longer in this new context."

Trump had threatened to impose 10 per cent tariffs on goods imported to the US from the UK, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, France, Germany, the Netherlands and Finland from 1 February, saying it could rise even further to 25 per cent in June unless a deal over the semi-autonomous island in the Arctic, is reached.

Holding placards reading 'Greenland is not for sale', thousands of people protest against US President Donald Trump's threats to annex the semi-autonomous country, in Nuuk, Greenland on Saturday **PHOTO: PTI**

Trump made the announcement on his Truth Social, saying it was "time for Greenland to give back" to the US and said that "world peace is at stake". He has repeatedly said that the US needs the mineral-rich island for national security. Europe has condemned Trump's threats.

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer said the threats were "completely wrong"

"It (Greenland)... is part of the Kingdom of Denmark, and its future is a matter for the Greenlanders and the Danes," said Starmer in a statement. "Applying tariffs on allies for pursuing the collective security of NATO allies is completely wrong."

Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson stressed that European allies won't be "blackmailed" while French President Emmanuel Macron described Trump's threat as "unacceptable"

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, said territorial integrity and sovereignty are fundamental principles of international law. "Tariffs would undermine transatlantic relations and risk a dangerous downward spiral".

Next week, Trump is set to meet Von der Leyen among other European leaders at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, where Greenland will dominate the agenda. *—Agencies*

An insulted Trump calls for Iran leadership change

WASHINGTON, 18 JAN

- Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei branded US President Donal Trump as a "criminal" for instigating the massive protests in the Islamic Republic

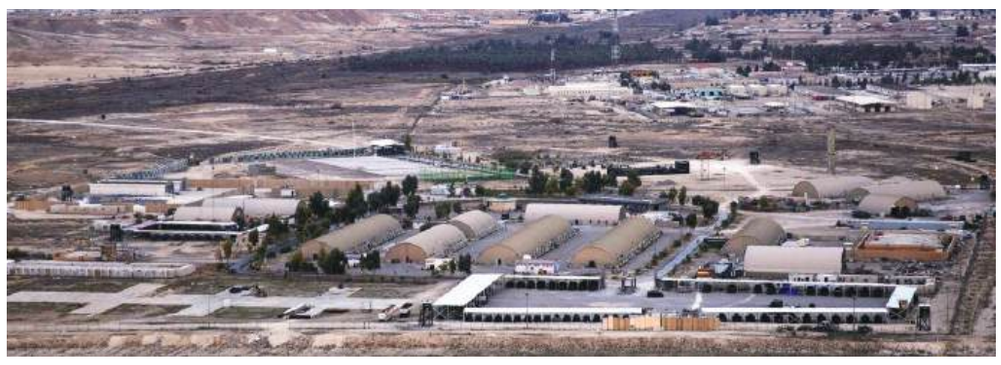
US President Donald Trump said "it's time to look for new leadership in Iran," after Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei branded the him as a "criminal" for instigating the massive protests in Iran.

"What he is guilty of, as the leader of a country, is the complete destruction of the country and violence at levels never seen before," Trump said on Saturday. "In order to keep the country functioning, Khamenei should focus on running his country properly, like I do with the US, and not killing people to keep control."

In an address to the nation on Saturday, Khamenei held Trump responsible for "several thousands" of deaths that occurred during the protests across Iran over the falling economy. He described the protesters as "foot soldiers" of the US and Israel .

At least 3,095 people were killed during the government's crackdown, the US-based Human Rights Activists News Agency said, although the actual toll may be significantly higher. The protests appear to have died down since Thursday after the crackdown, although communication blackout still remains.

Trump had told protesters that "help is on the way", but then changed his tone after Iran claimed it would not execute the 800 arrested protesters. *—Agencies*



US and Iraq agreed in 2024 that US forces would depart completely by September 2025. However, a small unit remained until Saturday **PHOTO: X @SENTDEFENDER**

Iraqi army fully takes over key base following US withdrawal

BAGHDAD, 18 JAN

US forces have fully withdrawn from an air base in western Iraq in implementation of an agreement with the Iraqi government, Iraqi officials said Saturday. Iraq's army now has taken over the bases.

Washington and Baghdad agreed in 2024 to wind down a US-led coalition fighting the Islamic State group in Iraq by September 2025, with US forces departing bases where they had been stationed.

However, a small unit of US military advisers and support personnel remained.

Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani in October told journalists that the agreement originally stipulated a full pullout of US forces from the Ain al-Asad air base in western Iraq by September. But "developments in Syria" since then required maintaining a "small unit" of between 250 and 350 advisers and security personnel at the base.

A US Ministry of Defence official said that all American equipment had also been removed.

US forces have retained a presence in the semi-autonomous Kurdish region in northern Iraq and in neighbouring Syria. *—PTI*

Israel objects to Gaza's 'Board of Peace' candidates named by WH

TEL AVIV, 18 JAN

Israel objected to US President Donald Trump's candidate selection for Gaza's 'Board of Peace', stating it "runs contrary to policy".

On Saturday, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said that Israel's Foreign Affairs Minister Gideon Sa'ar will express their concerns to US Secretary of State Marco Rubio.

Israel has objected to the Gaza Executive Board, which is subordinate to the Board of Peace, and features former British prime minister Tony Blair, Trump's envoy Steve Witkoff, his son-in-law Jared Kushner, World Bank Group President Ajay Banga, Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan, Qatari diplomat Ali Al Thawadi and others.

Netanyahu's office said that the White House announcement on Saturday was not coordinated with Israel.

The White House said that part of Trump's 20-point ceasefire deal, will have a defined portfolio, includes reconstruction, stabilisation and governance in Gaza.

A yellow block demarcating the "Yellow Line," which separates the Gaza Strip since the October ceasefire, in Jabalia **PHOTO: PTI**

THE ILL DEFINED 'YELLOW LINE'

Israel military had withdrawn to a "yellow line" in Gaza, as part of the October ceasefire deal. However, the ill-defined has been the difference between life and death for many Palestinians.

Of 447 Palestinians killed since the ceasefire, at least 77 were killed by Israeli gunfire near the line, including 62 who crossed it, according to the Gaza Health Ministry.

The buffer zone is up to 7 kms deep, and includes most of Gaza's arable land and its border crossings. *—Agencies*

HINDU BUSINESSMAN KILLED OVER 'STOLEN' BANANAS IN BANGLADESH

DHAKA, 18 JAN

A Hindu businessman was beaten to death in Gazipur by three members of a family following a dispute over bananas.

The deceased, Liton Chandra Ghosh, 55, was the owner of 'Baishakhi Sweetmeat and Hotel'.

According to Zakir Hossain, Officer-in-Charge of Kaliganj Police Station, Swapan Mia, 55, his wife Majeda Khatun, 45, and their son Masum Mia, 28 have been detained for their alleged involvement.

Police stated that Masum owns a banana plantation, and a bunch of bananas went missing from it. He spotted the bananas in Liton's hotel, and an argument started."The accused punched and kicked Liton, causing him to fall to the ground and die on the spot," police said.

It is not confirmed if the incident is related to the ethnic violence incident from Saturday in the Kaliganj.

Police are investigating the incident. *—PTI*

Nepal holds 1st Assembly after protests

KATHMANDU, 18 JAN

The 19th session of Nepal's National Assembly commenced on Sunday at the Federal Parliament building in Singhdurbar Secretariat, Kathmandu. This is the first Upper House meeting since the Gen Z movement ousted the KP Oli government from power last year.

Following the movement, President Ramchandra Paudel dissolved the House of Representatives (Lower House) in September 2025. The dissolution came at the recommendation of the interim Prime Minister, Sushila Karki, while the National Assembly (Upper House) remained.

The National Assembly (NA), consists of 59 members and is the permanent house of the Parliament. The winter session of the Upper House was headed by Narayan Prasad Dahal, Chairman of the House. Members of the Upper House serve six-year terms, with one-third retiring every two years.

This is the first Upper House meeting since the Gen Z movement ousted the KP Oli government from power last year **PHOTO: AIR**

Meanwhile, former Nepal prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba on Sunday filed a writ at the apex court against the Election Commission for officially recognising the Gagan Thapa-led Nepali Congress, days after it split from his faction. *—PTI*

Pro and anti-ICE protesters clash in Minneapolis

MINNEAPOLIS, 18 JAN

Rival protesters clashed in Minneapolis on Saturday as the governor's office said National Guard troops were ready for deployment. The unrest comes amid a surge of protests against the Trump administration's increased immigration enforcement in the Twin Cities.

Anti-ICE protesters condemn immigration officers' tactics, which led to the fatal shooting of Renee Good on 7 January.

The state guard has been "mobilised" to support the State Patrol said-Minnesota Governor Tim Walz.

A large group of anti-ICE protesters in downtown Minneapolis confronted a smaller pro-ICE group, chased them and forced at least one person to remove an allegedly objectionable shirt.

Jake Lang, who organised the pro-ICE demonstration, was injured during the clash. Lang was previously charged with assaulting an officer and civil disorder before receiving clemency as part of US President Donald Trump's pardon of 6 January 2025.

On Friday, a federal judge ruled that immigration officers cannot detain or tear gas peaceful protesters. *—PTI*

Anti-ICE protesters in Minneapolis, Saturday **PHOTO: PTI**

Russian strikes kill 2 as Ukraine freezes

KYIV, 18 JAN

Two people were killed, and dozens more have been injured in overnight Russian drone strikes across Ukraine, said Ukranian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. The attacks on the energy infrastructure have also caused massive power outages amid freezing temperatures of minus 18 degrees Celsius.

Zelenskyy said on Sunday that the Sumy, Kharkiv, Dnipro, Zaporizhia, Khmelnytskyi and Odesa regions were targeted in an assault involving more than 200 drones. A child was among the inured.

The Ukrainian government has declared an energy emergency, with the damaged power grid meeting only 60 per cent of the country's electricity requirements during the cold season. At least 400 settlements remained without power on Sunday.

The capital Kyiv, and the Kharkiv and Zaporizhia regions have been among the worst affected by power outages, Zelenskyy said.

Meanwhile, Ukraine's Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha said that Rusia intends to target the nuclear energy infrastructure in Ukraine to further weaken the power-supply. *—ANI*

Energy grid strike weakens power supply **PHOTO: UKRAINE EMERGENCY SERVICE**

FAMILY PLANNING

China's condom tax to bolster child birth comes a cropper

COLLEGE STATION, 18 JAN

Once the world's most populous nation, China is now among the many Asian countries struggling with anaemic fertility rates. In an attempt to double the country's rate of 1.0 children per woman, Beijing is reaching for a new tool: taxes on condoms, birth control pills and other contraceptives.

As of January 1, such items were subject to a 13 per cent value-added tax. Meanwhile, services such as child care and matchmaking remain duty-free.

The move comes after China, last year, allocated 90 billion yuan (USD12.7 billion) for a national child care programme, giving families a one-off payment of around 3,600 yuan (over USD500) for every child aged three or under.

Dudley L. Poston Jr from Texas A&M University, who has studied China's demography over the last four decades, said that past attempts by the country's communist government to reverse slumping fertility rates through policies encouraging couples to have more children have not worked.

China now subjects contraceptives 13 per cent VAT **PHOTO: AI**

"I do not expect these new moves to have much, if any, effect on reversing the fertility rate decline to one of the world's lowest and far below the 2.1 'replacement rate' needed to maintain a stable population," he pointed out.

Demographers refer to a term called "low-fertility trap." According to it, once a country's fertility rate drops below 1.5 or 1.4 – far higher than China's now stands – it is very difficult to increase it by 0.3 or more. It is unlikely that China's three-child policy will have any influence at all on raising the fertility rate. Taxing condoms will also have very little effect, Dudley pointed out. *—Agencies*

PHOTO: ANI

Mercedes-Benz India seeks duty cut for luxury cars

PUNE, 18 JAN

Mercedes-Benz India Managing Director and CEO Santosh Iyer has called for rationalisation of customs duties on imported luxury cars, saying it would boost demand in the premium segment and increase overall tax revenue. Speaking ahead of the Union Budget, he said the current duties of 70 per cent to an effective 110 per cent are excessive and should be brought under a single slab, similar to last year's GST rate rationalisation. Iyer also stressed the need for stable macroeconomic policies and better fiscal management to curb rupee depreciation, which has raised costs and hurt demand. He said Mercedes-Benz may raise vehicle prices by about 2 per cent each quarter in 2026. Investment in road infrastructure will support luxury car sales. *—PTI*

Amway India posts loss of Rs 76.25 cr during FY25

NEW DELHI, 18 JAN

Amway India's losses widened in FY25, with the direct seller reporting a total loss of Rs 74.25 crore, compared with Rs 53.38 crore a year earlier, according to a regulatory filing. Revenue from operations declined 10.56 per cent to Rs 1,148.16 crore, while total income fell 9.2 per cent to Rs 1,174.85 crore for the year ended March 31, 2025, data from Tofler showed. The company cut costs amid slow growth in India's direct selling industry. Total expenses were down 7.3 per cent to Rs 1,249.10 crore, with advertising and sales promotion spending reduced by 40.6 per cent. Royalty payments to its US parent also fell. Revenue across different key segments, including nutrition, personal care, home care and beauty, declined during the year. *—PTI*

Netweb Tech expects 72% sales growth in FY26

NEW DELHI, 18 JAN

High-performance computing solutions manufacturer Netweb Technologies expects to close the year with 72 per cent sales growth to Rs 2,000 crore on a year-over-year basis. Netweb Chairman and Managing Director Sanjay Lodha on Sunday told reporters, "I used to say that our fiscal year will be around Rs 1,600 crore. "We have already clocked around Rs 1,400 crore. This year I am projecting that in total it should be around Rs 2,000 crore," The company posted a revenue of over Rs 1,158 crore in FY2025, which is significant for being unaffected by the new labour codes that affected other firms. The company reported a over twofold jump in the December quarter. *—PTI*

Sumadhura to invest Rs 6,000cr in Bengaluru

NEW DELHI, 18 JAN

Bengaluru-based realty firm Sumadhura Group will invest around Rs 6,000 crore this quarter to develop six new housing projects in Bengaluru. These upcoming projects, located in the east and north Bengaluru, would have a total saleable area of over 8 million square feet. Sumadhura Group Chairman and Managing Director Madhusudhan G told reporters, "Housing demand in Bengaluru continues to be strong. We are launching six premium projects, comprising more than 4,000 units that include apartments and residential plots. "We are expecting a total revenue of about Rs 10,000 crore from these six projects," Madhusudhan G said. According to real estate analytics firm PropEquity, housing sales in Bengaluru remained flat at nearly 16,000 units during October-December.- *—PTI*

After much loss, Discoms post profit of Rs 2,701 cr

Faced losses of Rs 25,553 cr in FY24, Rs 67,962 cr in FY14

NEW DELHI, 18 JAN

Power distribution utilities in the country collectively recorded a profit of Rs 2,701 crore in FY25 after having incurred losses for several years, an official statement said on Sunday.

Distribution utilities as a whole have been reporting losses for past several years since unbundling and corporatization of State Electricity Boards.

The utilities collectively posted a loss of Rs 25,553 crore in FY24 and a loss of Rs 67,962 crore in FY14, the power ministry said in a statement.

Commenting on the profit in FY25, Power Minister Manohar Lal said this marks a new chapter for the distribution sector and is a result of several steps taken by the ministry to redress the concerns of the distribution sector.

Union Power Minister Manohar Lal said that the profits in FY25 is a result of measures taken to address concerns of the distribution sector *PHOTO: X*

He said the government is committed to the required reforms in the sector so that the power sector can support India's growing economy and play its part in the journey towards Viksit Bharat.

The ministry said the result of reforms is evident not just in the PAT posted by distribution companies (discoms) after so many years, but also in other performance indicators.

The Aggregate Technical & Commercial (AT&C) losses have reduced over the years, signalling a transformation.

The AT&C losses have reduced from 22.62 per cent in FY 2013-14 to 15.04 per cent in FY 2024-25.

Further, signalling much improved cost recovery, the Average Cost of Supply–Average Revenue Realized (ACS–ARR) gap has narrowed from Rs 0.78/kWh in FY14 to Rs 0.06/kWh in FY25.

Reforms such as the Electricity (Late Payment Surcharge) Rules have led to a 96 per cent reduction in outstanding dues to generating companies—from Rs 1,39,947 crore in 2022 to just Rs 4,927 crore by January 2026—while bringing down distribution utility payment cycles from 178 days in FY 21 to 113 days in FY 25. *—PTI*

LACK OF QUORUM

Cancelled meet delays Neville's Tata Trust entry

NEW DELHI, 18 JAN

A proposed board meeting of the Sir Ratan Tata Trust (SRTT), which was supposed to take up the appointment of Neville Tata, son of Tata Trusts chairman Noel Tata, as a trustee has been cancelled due to lack of quorum.

The cancellation comes over two months after the failure of the first attempt to induct Neville Tata on the board of SRTT, which holds 23.6 per cent in Tata Sons, the promoter holding firm of the over USD 180 billion Tata Group.

"All trustees could not attend, which is a requirement for trustee appointment," a source said.

However, others said the cancellation could be to take more time for discussion among the trustees to reach a consensus on the appointment.

The trustees of SRTT are Noel, Venu Srinivasan, Vijay Singh Jimmy N Tata, Jehangir HC Jehangir and Darius Khambata.

In 2025, Neville and former group company leader Bhaskar Bhat were appointed to the Sri Dorabji Tata Trust , which owns 28 per cent in Tata Sons. However, they couldn't be appointed to the SRTT.

It was apparently because of an objection raised by Srinivasan, who was made lifelong trustee in 2025. *—PTI*

The ongoing foreign portfolio investors sell-off has contributed to the nearly 5 per cent depreciation of the rupee against the dollar *PHOTO: X*

FPIs' selling spree on, withdraw Rs 22,000 cr

NEW DELHI, 18 JAN

Foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) have withdrawn over Rs 22,530 crore (USD 2.5 billion) from Indian equities in January thus far, perpetuating a selling trend that began in 2025 due to rising US bond yields and a stronger dollar. This follows an outflow of Rs 1.66 lakh crore (USD 18.9 billion) recorded last year, attributed to volatile currency movements, global trade tensions, and concerns over potential US tariffs alongside stretched market valuations.

The ongoing FPI sell-off has contributed significantly to the nearly 5 per cent depreciation of the rupee against the dollar over the past year. Data from the National Securities Depository Limited (NSDL) indicates this outflow occurred between 1 and 16 January.

Market analysts have pointed to a mix of global and domestic factors driving this withdrawal. "Rising US bond yields and a stronger dollar have improved risk-adjusted returns in developed markets, prompting capital reallocation away from emerging markets," said Sachin Jasuja, Head of Equities at Centricity WealthTech. Himanshu Srivastava from Morningstar added that elevated US bond yields have made US assets more appealing, while geopolitical uncertainties continue to dampen emerging market risk appetite.

VK Vijayakumar, chief investment strategist at Geojit Investments, noted that the uncertainty regarding the US-India trade agreement is further affecting investor sentiment. He suggested that the FPIs' selling trend may persist until clear positive triggers emerge to encourage market stability. *—PTI*

WEF ANNUAL MEETING

Indian biz must compete on cost, scale, resilience: BCG

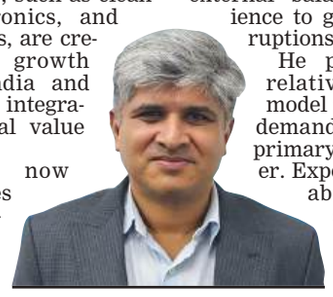
DAVOS, 18 JAN:

With India gearing up for the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting, consultancy major BCG's India Head Rahul Jain has said that Indian businessmen want the competitiveness to come from combining cost, scale and resilience.

Jain said that India is very likely to become the world's third-largest economy by around 2030.

"India becoming the third-largest economy will depend on accelerating the manufacturing sector from 15-17 per cent of GDP today to 20 per cent and beyond," Jain said.

Jain said investments in sunrise sectors, such as clean energy, electronics, and semiconductors, are creating new growth engines in India and deepen India's integration into global value chains.



Geopolitics now actively shapes trade and value-chains as much as economics.

India is growing at about 6-7 per cent, with import substitution and supply-chain localisation improving India's external balance and resilience to global trade disruptions.

He praised India's relatively balanced model where domestic demand remains the primary shock absorber. Exports account for about 20-21 per cent of GDP. AI will be centra to India's next growth. *—PTI*

Adani Solar is among top 10 firms

NEW DELHI, 18 JAN

Adani Solar has emerged as the only Indian company in Wood Mackenzie's Global Solar Module Manufacturer Ranking for the first half of 2025, highlighting India's growing prominence in clean energy manufacturing. The solar arm of Adani New Industries Limited achieved a Grade A classification, securing the eighth position on the list, with a score of 81 points.

JA Solar and Trinasolar jointly claimed the top spot with scores of 91.7 and 91.6. Wood Mackenzie assesses companies based on shipments, bankability, and performance, evaluating 38 manufacturers on ten criteria, including financial health and manufacturing track record.

Despite Chinese companies dominating the list, the report noted an increasingly diverse competitive landscape, including firms from India, South Korea, Singapore, and the United States. The top 10 manufacturers reported a USD 2.2 billion net loss. *—PTI*

UNION BUDGET 2026

Market participants urge government to ease equity tax

NEW DELHI, 18 JAN

Market participants have urged the government to ease capital market taxation, including a higher exemption limit on long-term capital gains, ahead of the Union Budget for 2026-27.

They also suggested that the government avoid further increases in transaction taxes.

The Union Budget will be presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on 1 February.

Market stakeholders also demanded enhancement of the tax-free exemption limit on long-term capital gains (LTCG) from equity investments to provide greater relief to retail and long-term investors.

In its budget wishlist, JM Financial Services recommended that the government should raise the tax-free exemption limit for equity LTCG from Rs 1.25 lakh to Rs 2 lakh.

Additionally, Brazil and Nigeria are emerging as key export destinations for Indian pharmaceutical firms amid global economic uncertainties, according to the commerce ministry data.

Nigeria added USD 179 million in exports and contributibuted over 14 per cent to the total export growth. *—PTI*

Market valuation of 3 firms rises by Rs 75,855 cr

NEW DELHI, 18 JAN

PHOTO: PTI

The combined market capitalisation of three of India's top 10 most valued companies rose by Rs 75,855.43 crore during a holiday-shortened week, with State Bank of India (SBI) and Infosys emerging as the biggest gainers, despite a largely sluggish equity market.

The BSE Sen sex ended the week marginally lower, slipping 5.89 points, while the NSE Nifty edged up by 11.05 points. SBI recorded the largest increase in valuation, adding Rs 39,045.51 crore to reach a market capitalisation of Rs 9,62,107.27 crore. Infosys followed closely, with its valuation rising by Rs 31,014.59 crore to Rs 7,01,889.59 crore. ICICI Bank also posted gains of Rs 5,795.33 crore, taking its market value to Rs 10,09,470.28 crore.

Seven other major firms witnessed a combined erosion of Rs 75,549.89 crore in market value. Reliance Industries saw the sharpest decline, losing Rs 23,952.48 crore, followed by Larsen & Toubro with a drop of Rs 23,501.8 crore. *—PTI*

Strong BCCL IPO fuels Coal India listing plans: CMD

KOLKATA, 18 JAN

The strong investor response to the initial public offering of Bharat Coking Coal Ltd (BCCL) has boosted confidence within Coal India Ltd (CIL) and strengthened momentum for listing other subsidiaries, Chairman-cum-Managing Director B Sairam said.

The IPO of BCCL, a CIL arm, was fully subscribed within minutes of opening on 9 January 9 and closed with subscriptions of more than 146 times, underlining robust investor interest.

Sairam said the response had reinforced confidence in the miner and would guide future listings, while stressing that market conditions and valuation would remain key factors.

The government has been urging Coal India to unlock value through the listing of its subsidiaries as part of public sector reforms. CIL has eight owned subsidiaries. *—PTI*

India's forex reserves rise by $392M in a week

NEW DELHI, 18 JAN

India's foreign exchange reserves saw a marginal rise of USD 392 million in the week ending 9 January, reaching USD 687.193 billion. This increase was primarily driven by a surge in gold reserves, despite a decline in foreign currency assets, according to the Reserve Bank of India's latest 'Weekly Statistical Supplement'. This follows a significant drop in the previous week.

The foreign exchange reserves remain close to the all-time high of USD 704.89 billion, achieved in September 2024.

For the reporting week, India's foreign currency assets stood at USD 550.866 billion, down USD 1.124 billion. Gold reserves rose to USD 112.830 billion, increasing by USD 1.568 billion, attributed to the rising price of gold amidst global uncertainties and strong investment demand.

After a monetary policy review in early December, the RBI confirmed that the country's foreign exchange reserves are sufficient to cover over 11 months of merchandise imports.

The RBI maintains that India's external sector is resilient and capable of meeting external financing needs comfortably. *—ANI*

GALAXEYE PROJECTS

Mission Drishti targets 10 satellites by 2030

NEW DELHI, 18 JAN

PHOTO: AI

Space start-up GalaxEye is set to launch its first-of-a-kind satellite that would generate images of the earth fusing data from optical and radar sensors, which have applications in sectors ranging from defence to agriculture.

The start-up plans to launch "Mission Drishti", a multi-sensory earth observation satellite, in the first quarter of this year and scale it up to a constellation of 10 satellites by 2030.

"Mission Drishti represents a global first: a single satellite platform that has integrated radar sensing and optical imaging, while also standing as India's largest privately developed satellite," Suyash Singh, co-founder and CEO of GalaxEye.

GalaxEye plans to deploy two more satellites by the end of the next few years and six-seven more satellites by the end of the decade, scaling the total satellite constellation to 10 by 2030, enabling near real time data delivery at scale, Singh said.

"This dedicated constellation will unlock time sensitive applications across defence and surveillance, disaster response, agriculture, infrastructure monitoring and climate intelligence," he said.

While the multi-spectral optical camera captures images of the earth, the synthetic aperture radar enables the observations under cloud cover, thus enabling all-weather observation of the earth.

GalaxEye's patented SyncFused OptoSAR technology integrates data from both the sensors to produce all-weather images of earth, which has applications across sectors. This persistent intelligence capability was critical as government and defence customers move beyond siloed data sources. *—PTI*

- "Mission Drishti represents a single satellite platform that has integrated radar sensing and optical imaging," said Suyash Singh, co-founder and CEO of GalaxEye.

PHOTO: PTI

Virat Kohli completes 54th ODI century

INDORE, 18 JAN

Virat Kohli hit a record-extending 54th century in One-Day Internationals against New Zealand to hold India together in the third and final match of the series here on Sunday. The batting superstar, who had missed the milestone in the first ODI of the series in Vadodara when he fell for 93, brought up his ton with a single off Zak Foulkes on the final ball of the 40th over. Kohli cracked eight fours and two sixes and brought up his century on the 91st ball of his innings. Kohli dropped anchor at one end and remained persistent in a tough run-chase on a benign wicket where India had slipped to 71 for four at one stage after New Zealand posted 337 for eight.—*PTI*

Toppmoller out as Frankfurt coach ahead of crucial CL games

FRANKFURT, 18 JAN

Dino Toppmoller paid the price for Eintracht Frankfurt's leaky defense as he was fired Sunday ahead of two crucial games that will decide whether Frankfurt avoids an early exit from the Champions League.Toppmoller had been with Frankfurt since 2023 and led the team back to the Champions League after finishing third in the Bundesliga last season.The club said in a statement that their working relationship ended with immediate effect.His last game was Frankfurt's 3-3 draw with Werder Bremen on Friday, which took the team's winless run to four games. Frankfurt has conceded 39 goals in 17 Bundesliga games.—*PTI*

PHOTO: X/@LEON

Marchand clinches men's 200m breaststroke title

AUSTIN, 18 JAN

French swim star Leon Marchand out-duelled Denis Petrashov to win the 200m breaststroke at the Austin Pro Swim Series on Saturday, closing out the meeting with his third victory of the week. Marchand, who counted the 200m breaststroke among his four gold medals at the Paris Olympics, was third at the 100m mark. He had taken a narrow lead at the final turn, but it wasn't until the closing meters that he gained a decisive advantage, touching in 2 minutes and 9.72 seconds to beat Kyrgyzstan's Petrashov by 1.03 seconds.—*PTI*

England's Pak-origin players receive visas

SYDNEY, 30 OCT

The International Cricket Council has stepped in to facilitate visa formalities for all 42 players and officials of Pakistan origin bound for the T20 World Cup in India. In the England squad, cricketers of Pakistani lineage include spinners Adil Rashid, Rehan Ahmed, and pacer Saqiib Mahmood. Ali Khan and Shayan Jahangir will represent the USA, while the Netherlands has Zulfiqar Saqib, among others. PTI has learned that visas have already been cleared for England players Rashid, Rehan, and Saqib. Members of the Netherlands squad have also received their visas. Canada staff member Shah Saleem Zafar has also been granted clearance.—*PTI*

India Open: Lin, An win men's & women's singles

Mixed doubles crown went to Dechapol and Supissara

NEW DELHI, 18 JAN

Chinese Taipei's Lin Chun-Yi *PHOTO: PTI*

An Se Young of South Korea *PHOTO: PTI*

Chinese Taipei's Lin Chun-Yi claimed his maiden Super 750 title in men's singles, while world number one An Se Young of South Korea underlined her supremacy by securing the women's singles crown at the USD 950,000 India Open here on Sunday.

The 26-year-old Lin, currently ranked 12, completed a sharp turnaround from an early exit at last week's Malaysia Open Super 1000, powering his way to the men's singles title with a 21-10, 21-18 win over third seed Jonatan Christie in the final. In women's singles, top seed and defending champion An Se Young was once again in control as she defeated China's world number two Wang Zhiyi 21-13, 21-11 to claim her second title of the season.In doubles, China's top-seeded women's pair of Liu Shengshu and Tan Ning secured the title with a 21-11, 21-18 victory over Japan's fifth-seeded Yuki Fukushima and Sayaka Matsumoto in a 58-minute final.

Paris Olympics silver medallist combination of Liang Weikeng and Wang Chang of China rallied from a game down to beat Japan's world No. 22 Hiroki Midorikawa and Kyohei Yamashita 17-21 25-23 21-16 in the men's doubles final.

The mixed doubles crown went to Thailand's third-seeded Dechapol Puavaranukroh and Supissara Paewsampran, who edged Denmark's Mathias Christiansen and Alexandra Bøje 19-21, 25-23, 21-18.Lin, who had come close to winning a Super 750 title at China Masters in September, arrived in India nursing a muscle strain sustained in Kuala Lumpur, which had initially made walking difficult, but chose to compete and made the most of the opportunity.

The left-handed shuttler produced an attacking game, troubling Jonatan with his pace. The Indonesian also failed to negotiate the drift in the hall as he missed his touch, allowing the left-handed Taiwanese to go on a rampage, opening up an 11-5 lead and then reeling off another seven points to run away with the opening game.

In the second game, Jonatan put up a better fight and had leads of 6-4, 9-7, and 18-1,5 but Lin was always breathing down his neck and wrested back the momentum in the final stages with six straight points to seal the issue."I think I played pretty well today. I didn't feel much pressure, and I felt like I was playing happily," Lin said."I didn't feel very good in Malaysia, but in India I felt freer on court."The Chinese Taipei shuttler, who comes from a farming family, said the title had boosted his confidence."I'm very happy to win my first Super 750 title. It shows that I can stand on my own feet. My goal is to be in the top 10 in the world this year. Perseverance is the key, whether I win or lose," he said.

Away from badminton, Lin said competitive video games help him unwind."I like games where two sides are attacking and defending each other, like PUBG or Counter-Strike," he added. —*PTI*

WOMEN'S PREMIER LEAGUE

In-form RCB look to continue winning run against sliding GG

VADODARA, 18 JAN

- The Women's Premier League will take a mid-season break on Sunday, January 18, as the caravan moves to Vadodara. The DY Patil Stadium in Navi Mumbai had been hosting the games thus far

On a roll, the Smriti Mandhana-led Royal Challengers Bengaluru will look to extend their winning run when they face Gujarat Giants in the Women's Premier League here on Monday.

Unbeaten RCB are the team to beat in the tournament, having registered their fourth consecutive win on Saturday.

GG, on the other hand, started on a bright note, winning their first two games before losing the next two to be placed third in the WPL table.

The icing on the cake for RCB is skipper Mandhana's return to form as she struck a match-defining 96 against Delhi Capitals in their emphatic eight-wicket win on Saturday.

Opener Grace Harris too has got good starts in the four matches RCB boasts of a strong batting line-up in the form of hard-hitting wicket-keeper batter Richa Ghosh, Nadine de Klerk, Gautami Nai,k and Radha Yadav.

While RCB's bowling unit too is a potent force with the likes of Lauren Bell and Sayali Satghare providing the initial impetus, able support is provided from spinners like Shreyanka Patil, Prema Rawat, and Yadav.

GG's bowling is being led by Renuka Singh, who has failed to impress in the tournament so far. Devine has been GG's stand-out performer with both bat and ball, but the likes of Kashvee Gautam, Gardne,r and Wareham will need to pitch in with the ball against RCB. Match starts: 7.30 pm—*PTI*

Bengal Tigers bounce back to beat SG Pipers 3-2

BHUBANESWAR,, 18 JAN

Shrachi Bengal Tigers came from behind to defeat SG Pipers 3-2 and remain in the fray for a top-four finish in their final pool stage match of the men's Hockey India League here on Sunday.

Jugraj Singh (45th), Abhishek (45th), and Affan Yousuf (48th) scored the goals for the Tigers after Dilraj Singh (4th) and Tomas Domene (31st) had put the Pipers ahead in the contest.

The Pipers struck first with a sweeping move built from the back. Aditya Lalage surged forward and slipped a pass to Dilraj, who converted it into a goal with a reverse-hit from close range. —*PTI*

SERIE A

Lobotka scores after 3 years as Napoli beats Sassuolo 1-0

LONDON, 18 JAN

Napoli ended a run of three consecutive draws with a 1-0 win over Sassuolo in Serie A at the Diego Armando Stadium in Naples on Sunday.

Stanislav Lobotka scored his first goal in more than three years, volleying in a rebound in the seventh minute after Sassuolo goalkeeper Arijanet Muric could only parry a shot by Eljif Elmas.The win, however, might have come at a cost.

Elmas and Napoli teammate Amir Rrahmani came off injured in the second half. Rrahmani's will be more concerning as it appeared to be a muscle issue in his left thigh, while Elmas felt dizzy after taking a knock to the head.

Matteo Politano also appeared to have a muscular problem in stoppage time but stayed on albeit with little movement because Napoli used up all of its substitutions. —*PTI*

BWF WILL TEST ITS 25-SECOND TIME CLOCK TRIALS

NEW DELHI, 18 JAN

The Badminton World Federation (BWF) will test its 25-second time clock at the Indonesia Masters next week, continuing trials at select World Tour tournaments to curb tactical delays and standardise match flow, a move that has drawn mixed reactions from players and coaches.Under the system, the clock starts once the umpire updates the score, with both server and receiver required to be ready to serve and receive before 25 seconds expire.

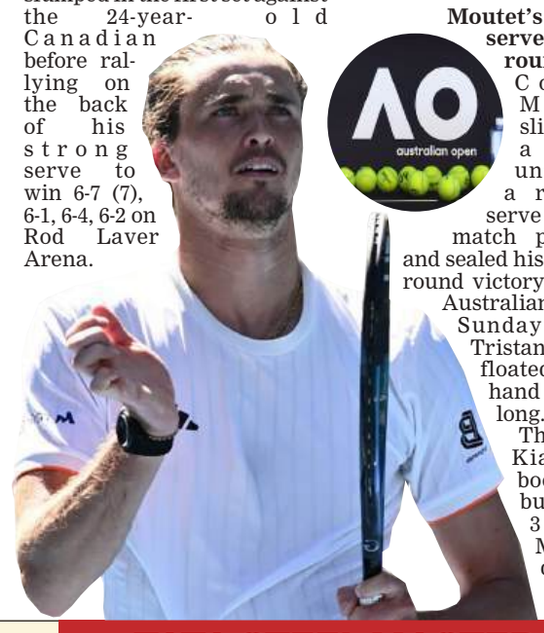
China's world number two Wang Zi Yi welcomed the move, saying the players would adapt if the rule was enforced uniformly."If the rule is going to apply, players will adjust to it. It will address the issue of delay by players," Wang told PTI. Denmark's Mathias, however, expressed scepticism, questioning whether the clock will address the root of the problem. —*PTI*

Zverev overcomes sluggish start to win AO

MELBOURNE, 18 JAN

Third-seeded Alexander Zverev shrugged off a sluggish start to power through his first-round match against rising star Gabriel Diallo as the Australian Open got underway on Sunday.

Zverev, the runner-up at Melbourne Park last year, slumped in the first set against the 24-year-old Canadian before rallying on the back of his strong serve to win 6-7 (7), 6-1, 6-4, 6-2 on Rod Laver Arena.



Moutet's underarm serve seals first-round win

Corentin Moutet sliced in an underarm serve on match point and sealed his first-round victory at the Australian Open on Sunday when Tristan Schoolkate floated his forehand return too long.

The crowd at Kia Arena booed loudly, but the No. 32-seeded Moutet didn't flinch, He's into the second round at Melbourne Park for the 10th straight year. "Definitely, when I saw the draw, wasn't too happy to be honest," Zverev said in an on-court interview, speaking of the tricky challenge presented by No. 41-ranked Diallo. "He's very young, very talented. Unbelievably aggressive.

later saying he did what he needed to do to complete the 6-4, 7-6 (1), 6-3 win. He said the choice of service was more instinctual than planned.

Sabalenka cruises to win in opening clash

An error-strewn Aryna Sabalenka made a stodgy start to her Australian Open title charge with a 6-4, 6-1 win over French wildcard Tiantsoa Rakotomanga Rajaonah on Sunday.

The world number one, who is chasing a third Melbourne crown in four years, faces Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova of Russia or Chinese qualifier Bai Zhuoxuan next. The 27-year-old Belarusian, fresh from winning the season-opening Brisbane International, made a sloppy start in losing the first three points of the match when serving.

Danilovic makes epic comeback to knock out Venus

Olga Danilovic beat Venus Williams 6-7(5), 6-3, 6-4 at the Australian Open on Sunday after the Serbian fought back from 4-0 down in the deciding set to knock the American veteran out of the tournament in the first round.

Alcaraz swats aside Walton

Carlos Alcaraz kicked off his latest bid for a career Grand Slam by dismantling unseeded Australian Adam Walton 6-3, 7-6(2) , 6-2 in the first round of the Australian Open on Sunday, as the world number one showcased the power and precision befitting a player chasing history. The 22-year-old Spaniard, who can eclipse Don Budge and become the youngest man to win all four major singles titles at least once, gave a packed Rod Laver Arena an exhibition in shot-making that had fans either glued to their seats or rising in ovation. —*PTI*

ABATE, YESHI WIN MUMBAI MARATHON MEN'S AND WOMEN'S TITLES

MUMBAI, 18 JAN

Ethiopians' domination in the Mumbai Marathon continued as Tadu Abate Deme and Yeshi Kalayu Chekole won the men's and women's elite race titles respectively here on Sunday.

Abate clocked 2-hour 9-minute 55 seconds to emerge champion among the men's elite runners, while his Ethiopian compatriot Yeshi crossed the finish line in a time of 2:25:13 the fifth fastest time of the event.

It was the seventh time the Ethiopians took both men's and women's titles together in Mumbai out of the 21 editions.Leonard Kiprotich Langat (02:10:10) of Kenya and Merhawi (02:10:22). —*PTI*

TATA STEEL MASTERS

Erigaisi beats Pragg, Gukesh draws with Sindarov

AMSTERDAM, 18 JAN

Top seed Arjun Erigaisi scored a convincing victory over compatriot R. Praggnanandhaa, while world champion D. Gukesh played out a hard-fought draw against World Cup winner Javokhir Sindarov of Uzbekistan in the first round of the Tata Steel Masters in Wijk Aan Zee, the Netherlands.

After a delayed start caused by an environmental activist's protest, the world's oldest running super tournament final had enough excitement in the first round to keep the chess buffs glued to their screens for nearly five hours.

The first victory of the event was scored by Hans Moke Niemann of the United States, who was pleasantly surprised to notice an optical blunder by Slovenian Vladimir Fedoseev early in the middlegame.

Niemann pounced on the opportunity like a hawk, and Fedoseev resigned as early as move 16 when material loss was inevitable.

German Vincent Keymer was the other winner of the day, as he scored at the expense of Dutch star Anish Giri. Erigaisi, Keymer, and Niemann, on one point, share the lead. They are half a point ahead of Gukesh and seven others. —*PTI*

Al Nassr snaps 3-2 victory against Al Shabab

DUBAI, 18 JAN

Al Nassr returned to winning ways in the Saudi Pro League 2025-26 after a 3-2 win against 10-man Al Shabab on Saturday.

Both teams had players scoring an own goal, with Al Shabab's Saad Yaslam and Al Nassr's Mohamed Simakan putting the ball inside their respective nets. Apart from the own goals, Kingsley Coman and Abdulrahman Ghareeb got on the scoresheet for Al Nassr, while Carlos Junior scored for Al Shabab.

Al Shabab is 15th with 11 points.On a three-match losing run, Cristiano Ronaldo's Al Nassr must return to winning ways. And the start was brilliant when Yaslam put the ball inside his own net in the second minute in a bid to clear a grounded cross from Joao Felix, who had a decent impact from the left flank.

Six minutes later, Coman brought the roof down at the Al Awwal Park with a stunning overhead kick to double Al Nassr's lead. The chance came from another Felix cross, which reached Wesley at the far post. —*PTI*